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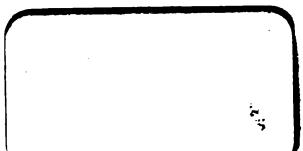
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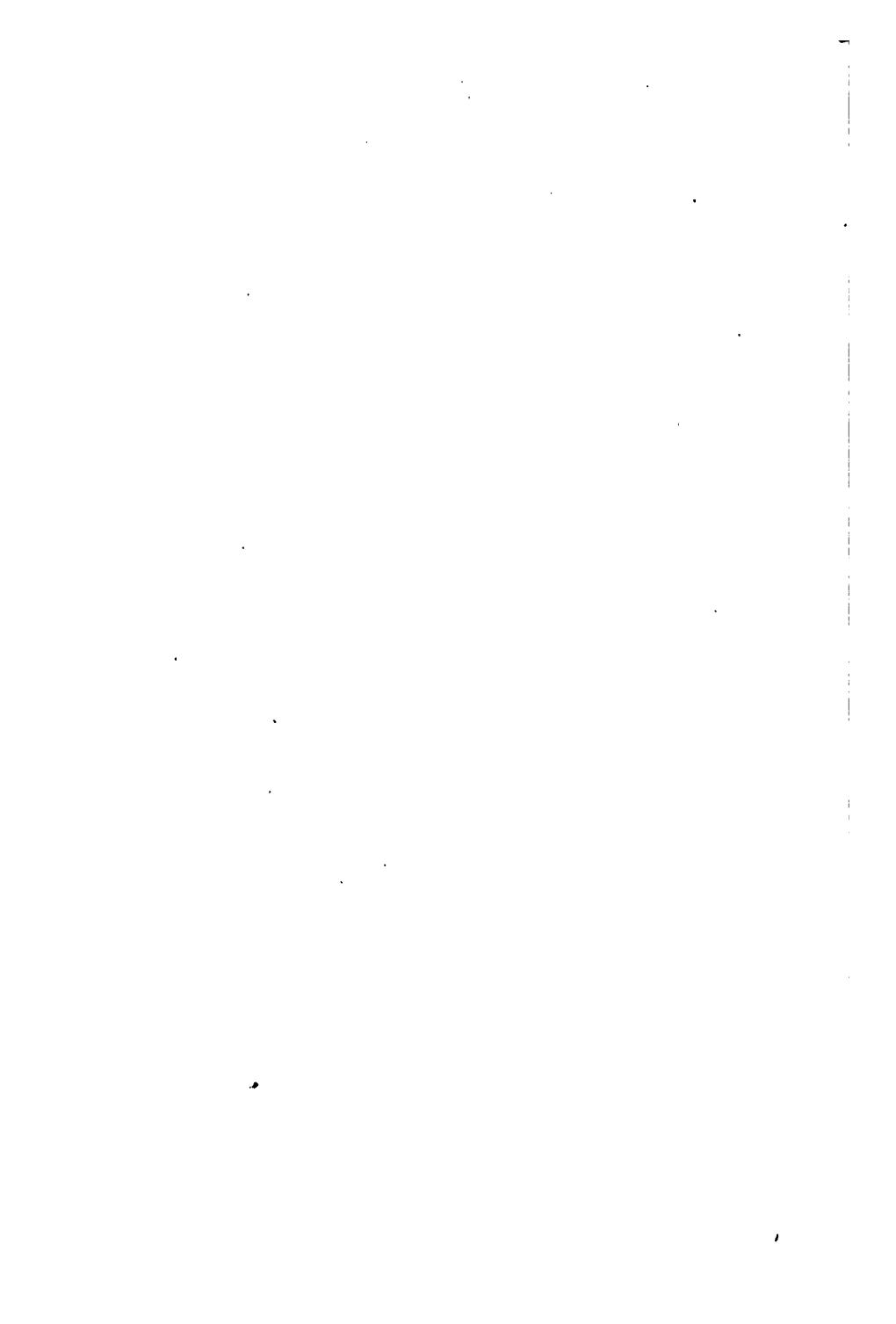
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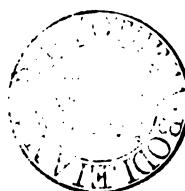
GRACE CLIFFORD

By

H. BOUVERIE PIGOTT

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. III



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G R A C E C L I F F O R D.

CHAPTER I.

HELEN'S ACCOUNT OF HERSELF.

ARCHIE went to York Place, determined to have an explanation with Helen respecting Harry Osborne. In spite of Frederick Osborne's irony, he felt that she must stand or fall in his opinion, according to the account she gave of her interview with Harry.

It was not fair to condemn her upon his mother's suspicions, or his own, regarding doings at Stedleigh, which might have proceeded from harmless gaiety, rather than deliberate forethought. She had not

enticed Harry to London, she had not even expected to meet him there, and the only question as to that was how she had behaved when she saw him. Archie could not leave London without having this cleared up, and, with a view to the clearing of it, he drove direct from Chancery Lane to York Place.

It was more than half-past-eleven when he reached Lady Mackenzie's, and he calculated on the probability of finding Helen alone, as Lady Mackenzie was usually engaged at her toilet at that hour—a matter which absorbed a very considerable time. On this occasion, however, his calculations were destined to prove wrong.

When he reached the drawing-room, Helen was not there, but, to his surprise, he found Lady Mackenzie already seated in full state, in her usual place on the sofa, before her favourite rose-wood sofa-table. A handsome gilt ink-stand, with her gold pen, and a seal lying on the tray, stood upon the table;

opposite to her was a portable writing-case, with note-paper on its open blotting-pad, and a package of envelopes, and two or three letters placed close by its side. From these signs a stranger might naturally infer that her Ladyship was about to answer those letters, but Archie, who knew her better, thought nothing of the kind. Lady Mackenzie, in her black moire antique, well made, and handsomely trimmed, her soft tulle cap, adorned with pretty French flowers, and grey ribbon, sitting on the same spot on the spring sofa, every day in the week, before her writing-case, with spread note-paper and envelopes, was no novelty to Archie Douglas.

Why her Ladyship should indulge in so unmeaning a display, no earthly soul could tell—but she did indulge in it—and Archie, who had at first laughed at the absurdity, latterly almost ceased to observe it, and, on the present occasion, he was too much pre-occupied even to think of it.

"Where is Helen, Lady Mackenzie?" he asked, as he shook hands with her. "I want to see her particularly."

Lady Mackenzie liked the sound of that. Perhaps, the tardy proposal was coming at last; although, on second thoughts, she considered he would scarcely set about it in such a premeditated manner, when her good-nature was sure to leave him plenty of opportunities, unless he was going to quit London. Yes, that might be it, and, actuated by this idea, she said:—

"I hope you are not going out of town?"

"You think I came to say good-bye, and you are right. I have had a letter from my father, recalling me to Stedleigh; but I may have to go elsewhere first." He was thinking of what might follow if he got Harry's address from Helen. "However, I must see my cousin before I leave. There is a matter of moment about which I want to speak to her."

This was all very nice. Archie wished

to go back to his father engaged to Helen, and a proposal of marriage was a matter of moment. It had been a matter of great moment to her ladyship once, when it was a debated question, and the to be, or not to be, undecided. She did not wish to be inquisitive any further, and, satisfied with the information she got, and the result she imagined, asked no more questions.

“We had an arrival here last night,” she said, “and Helen is in the next room with—”

She had not time to finish the sentence, when Helen drew back one-half of the folding doors, and stood in the opening.

“I thought I knew your voice,” she said, as Archie advanced towards her. “What a truant you are. You never came near me yesterday.”

“I did not intend to act so badly. I meant to have been here in the evening,” he replied, as they shook hands.

His manner was very grave, but Helen did not seem to perceive it.

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"I have a surprise for you, Archie," she said, keeping hold of his hand, and drawing him through the open doorway. "See who is here?"

It was a surprise, although not one that gave him any special pleasure. In a chair near the window, his shifting glance turned now on Archie, and now on Helen, with a hand laid on either knee, just as he used to see him at Inchcauldie, sat Angus Douglas.

"Papa, here is Archie," And Helen, letting go his hand, stood back a step or two.

"You look well, my boy," said Mr. Douglas, rising to shake hands, "only a bit sunburnt. It's very hot here, I think"—and the old man sat down again.

There was not much cordiality in the meeting. They had not seen each other for the last eight months; but, as far as the pleasure evinced on either side went, they might be supposed to have met yesterday.

"It is hot, Mr. Douglas," Archie said, in answer to his observation. "However, it is fine weather for travelling. How was Inchcauldie looking when you came away?"

"Pretty well. I am sorry your father is out of London."

"Did you want to see him?"

"Aye," the old man answered, after a moment's hesitation.

"He intended only to remain a day or two when he went; but I don't exactly know what he may do now. However, if it's anything particular, you could write to him, or run down to Stedleigh."

Archie had a sort of vague notion, that Angus's wish to see his father was connected with himself.

"May-be it is particular, and, may-be, it's not. It is just a little affair I want to consult him on. You don't snuff, I suppose?" Angus said, offering his box to Archie.

"He only smokes cigars," Helen observed, "and that is a sin of a lesser dye."

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“Lady Mackenzie scarcely thinks so. Do you remember how she grumbled the day I dined here?”

“You are out of Lady Mackenzie’s good graces for not coming to us yesterday.”

“She has no right to quarrel with me; the sin was against you, not her, and you forgave me.”

Helen laughed, she was the old Helen of Inchcauldie in her dark dress and snow-white collar, and very handsome she looked, standing near the open door, between the two lights.

“You have been enjoying yourself in London, I suppose?” Angus said, putting up his snuff-box.

“Yes, it’s a pleasant place, Mr. Douglas.”

“Where were you yesterday?” Helen asked.

“The truth is best, Helen; I went to Greenwich with a friend of Frederick Osborne, and I meant to have come here in the evening, but when we came back to Lon-

don we began to play billiards, and I forgot the time until it was too late."

" You are fond of billiards, are you ?" Angus asked, looking sharply into Archie's face.

" Yes, it's a nice game."

" A very nice game. I never played much at it myself, I had no money to throw away."

" Did you lose or win ?" Helen questioned.

" Well, I lost," Archie said, reddening ; " we played higher than usual, and I lost fifty pounds."

" London is a first-rate place for a young man," Angus Douglas observed, taking out his snuff-box again. " A first-rate place, and very pleasant."

While he dived into the depths of the snuff-box, Archie approached Helen.

" I want to speak to you for a moment alone," he said.

" Are you in a hurry ?"

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“Yes.”

“Papa, Archie and I are going to the dining-room; I have something I want to show him.”

She went down stairs before him, Archie following with the grave shadow on his face. They entered the dining-room, and stood together by the table.

“There is something the matter,” Helen said; “what is it, Archie?”

He would take her by surprise, startle her by a sudden question. He laid his hand on her arm.

“There is something the matter. Where is Harry Osborne?”

He felt her arm move nervously under his hand.

“Is he not at Stedleigh?” she said, her face all aglow.

“Did you think he was at Stedleigh?”

“I did until now. I have never heard from him, nor seen him, since the evening he came here in search of you.”

"Will you give me your word as a lady,
you know nothing about it?"

"I will, indeed; why should I hide it from
you if I did?"

Archie hesitated.

"I must say something unpleasant, Helen.
There has been dreadful work at Stedleigh.
Harry has broken off his match with Marion,
and you are the cause of it."

"But not by any fault of mine," she said,
the colour fading out of her cheek at the im-
plied blame.

"He does not throw the fault on you, and
I don't wish to throw it either. But you
were not candid with me when you spoke of
Harry's visit here."

"I was not candid, because I thought can-
dour was unwise. I had spoken to Mr.
Osborne, and told him he owed it to Marion
to return to her. I thought he had returned
to her, and therefore the best thing to do was
to bury his folly."

"You should have done more than that—

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you should have extracted a promise from him that he would go back. Now he has gone nobody knows where, except Frederick Osborne."

"If you had seen the state of excitement he was in, you would know it was not easy to reason with him. I did all I could, and I believed he would obey me."

She was gaining ground with Archie. She might have acted for the best, and if she thought Harry had gone to Stedleigh, candour would have been unwise.

"Did you tell him you did not love him? It is not, perhaps, a right question, but we are cousins, and old friends, Helen. Besides, I act in Marion's interest."

Her cheek flushed again.

"He never asked me such a question. I don't know that either of us even thought of it; but he knows I do not."

Archie shook his head.

"Men catch at straws," he said.

"But I never gave him even straws."

“ You used to talk to him at Stedleigh, Helen, and you said one or two little things no harm in themselves, perhaps, but that might have borne a meaning to him.”

“ Good gracious, Archie! is a girl not to speak to a man because he is engaged to be married? I never spoke to Mr. Osborne, except as I speak to any other gentleman I may meet. It appears to me as if you had come here armed with an accusation, and that I am to be the scape-goat to bear Mr. Osborne’s wrong doings.”

Her eye flashed indignantly.

“ I did not say you intended it: that you know best yourself. But be it as it may, this business is a terrible pull on Marion.”

“ I am deeply sorry for Marion, although I think they are disposed to be hard on me at Stedleigh; and you, too, are disposed to be hard; you, from whom I least expected it.” She laid her hand on his arm with a half caressing touch. “ Archie, dear, try to

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think better of me. Let them believe what they like, but don't you believe it."

How could he believe it now, she looked so truthful and so innocent? The blame he sought to throw on her in thought was undeserved; her simple gaiety at Stedleigh had not been coquettish trifling. Helen's gentle hand still lying on his arm, and the appeal in her eyes, were enough to settle the question.

"Harry has been a traitor of the worse sort, Helen; and even if you had acted foolishly, it would have been no excuse for him. But I will not be hard on you, as you say. I will not believe you are in fault at all."

"Nor am I in fault. I did what I could with him; I refused to listen to him; I forbid him to come here, and I told him he ought to go back to Stedleigh. I could wish now I had never gone there myself, since I have unintentionally caused such sorrow."

"Well, let us talk no more about it. What is done can't be undone; but if I knew where that rascal is, I'd make him sorry for it. I thought he might be dodging round here somewhere, until Osborne assured me he was not in London."

"And then you suspected me for being in correspondence with him," Helen said with a half smile.

"No I did not; I thought he might have written some mad rhapsody to you, but I never supposed you would answer it."

"I am glad you did not think that. What brought him to London?"

Archie hesitated. How was he to answer that question, seeing his mother's letter had told him the cause of the visit?"

"It was entirely a private matter which I cannot explain, Marion sent him."

Helen could not press the point, although she knew there was something behind.

"If I were you, Archie, and that you met Mr. Osborne, I would try to bring things

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round again, instead of quarrelling with him. Marion might forgive him, and he may be repenting even now."

"I'd see him hanged before I'd let her take such a pitiful creature. He had better not come sneaking down to Stedleigh on that errand, or any other."

"What does your father say to it?" does he blame me."

"No, indeed, he never threw a shadow of blame on you; he did not even tell me who the lady was that Harry pleaded an attachment to, as an excuse for breaking with Marion."

"Does Marion blame me?"

"Marion blames no one, Helen. At least, in the few lines I had from her, she blamed no one."

She asked no further questions. She saw enough to show, that the condemnation originated with Mr. Douglas.

"You don't expect your father in town?"

“ Not at present ; I am going down there, he has written for me.”

She looked disappointed.

“ You will be up very soon again, though.”

“ It is very uncertain. I was to have seen Lady Osborne at the opera to-night, and I had hoped to have had you and Lady MacKenzie with me, but I could not go now, even if I remained in town.”

“ When do you leave for Stedleigh ?”

“ Not until four o'clock. I intend driving out to Prince's Gate to apologise for my absence from the opera.”

“ You are always going to Prince's Gate,” she said, petulantly.

“ And I am always coming to York Place. You ought to be glad to get rid of me.”

“ But suppose I am not glad ?”

“ I will suppose it, then. It's a pleasant supposition, and I like to believe pleasant things,” he said, holding out his hand.

“ It is to be good-bye, Archie ; but for how long ?”

“I don’t know : not long, perhaps.”

He was anxious to get away ; he felt the conversation was taking a critical turn, he might say gallant things, and half loverly things if he failed in making his escape, and he did make it, leaving the false impression on her mind, that he meant to return soon, and Helen carried that impression up stairs to Lady Mackenzie, and her father.

Archie called a cab at the corner of the street, and drove at once to Lady Osborne’s. Her Ladyship and Sir George were in the drawing-room, Sir George dozing in the window, and Lady Osborne sitting in an easy chair reading a novel.

“I am very glad to see you, Mr. Douglas,” Lady Osborne said, motioning Archie to a seat near her own ; “Sir George and I were just speaking of you five minutes ago.”

“I am afraid you will think me intrusive, Lady Osborne,” Archie answered, with his eyes fixed on the sweet young face turned towards him, “but I came to apologize for

being compelled to break my engagement with you to-night. I am obliged to go to Stedleigh."

He wished to tell her why, and he waited for her answer. Perhaps she would ask him.

"I am very sorry to hear it, Mr. Douglas, and still more sorry for the cause. We have had a letter from Admiral Osborne."

"Then he told you of course about Harry. It came on me like a thunderbolt this morning. I never dreamt of treachery from him."

"It is hard to bear the treachery from a friend; but I think your sister had a good escape from such an unstable lover."

"Did the Admiral say where his son is?" Archie asked, still in pursuit of Harry's whereabouts.

"He did not. Come, Mr. Douglas, you must not look for him. If you met him you would do something rash."

"If I met him I should treat him as a

coward and a traitor deserves to be treated," Archie answered, with the lines set hard round his mouth.

Lady Osborne laid her finger lightly on his arm.

"Do not look so stern. I do not like to see you look so stern."

The touch of her hand, and the tone of her voice softened the expression of his face in a moment.

"I like you better now," she said, as she saw his muscles relax. "I shall believe myself quite a lion tamer. You have no idea how fierce you looked," and her ladyship glanced up with her soft smile.

"The fierceness is not to be wondered at, all thing considered, Lady Osborne, but I shall try not to look fierce again here."

"Well, remember that promise; and now about this handsome cousin of yours. I hear it is she who stole that foolish young man's wits away."

"She did not mean to steal them. What-

ever trouble she caused, she caused innocently."

"It has been a very painful business," Lady Osborne answered. "Will you believe me, Mr. Douglas, that in this affair, my sympathy, and Sir George's, go with your sister, and not with Harry Osborne?"

"I do believe it, and I sincerely thank you for it," Archie said, rising to go.

"Are you in a hurry?"

"Yes, rather; I have a few things to arrange before I leave London, and I must go by the four o'clock train."

"Mr. Douglas has come to say good-bye, Sir George," Lady Osborne said, approaching her husband along with Archie.

"Yes, yes," the Baronet muttered, as he rose to shake hands, and then he added something quite inaudible to Archie.

"He says he is sorry for his nephew's conduct; but he hopes it will not break up our acquaintance," Lady Osborne said, acting as interpreter.

"I should be very sorry to suppose it would, Sir George," Archie answered, as he turned away from the poor stupid old man, to his blooming young wife.

"You must take some flowers from the conservatory to show at Stedleigh how well they thrive in London air," Lady Osborne said. "Come and choose some for yourself."

She went with him along the lobby, and down the stairs to the conservatory.

"It must take great care to keep them in such perfection here," Archie said, as he followed her up the narrow avenue, flanked with rows of rich flowers.

"There is a beautiful camelia. Are you fond of camelias, Mr. Douglas?" Lady Osborne asked, stopping to point it out.

"I admire them greatly, but there is only one; it would be a sin to pluck it."

"Ah, well, here are geraniums," and her Ladyship bent her pretty head until the petals of a crimson fuchsia, rested against her soft brown hair.

She plucked a few of the geraniums, and gave them to Douglas.

" You will wear them in token of peace between us," she said.

" How can there be peace, where there never was war?" Archie answered, placing the flowers in the button hole of his coat.

" There never was, truly; but do you know, Mr. Douglas, I half feared there would be? I half feared when we got the Admiral's letter to-day, that you would quarrel with the name of Osborne, and refuse to number any one bearing it, amongst your friends."

" Not as long as you bear it, Lady Osborne."

" Now you are becoming personal," she said, colouring slightly, " while I was general."

He held out his hand.

" I could not help it: but you will forgive me, and say good-bye."

" For a little while only," she answered, as they left the conservatory, and stood at the

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top of the stairs. "You will be coming back to Miss Douglas."

"To London, perhaps, some day, Lady Osborne, but not to Miss Douglas," he answered, as he went downstairs; and Lady Osborne returned to her novel, not knowing whether to credit, or discredit his reply.

CHAPTER II.

HOME AGAIN.

ARCHIE drove from Prince's Gate to his hotel, paid his bill, gathered his luggage together, and reached the railway station just in time to catch the four o'clock down train to Stedleigh.

It was only four days since he had come along that same line, an up-passenger to London, and how much had happened since then ! The things he had calculated on had never occurred at all, and what he least dreamt of had come to pass.

He had not had that threatened interview

with his father, which was to have set matters right regarding Helen Douglas, and he could not have it now. He was going to a home where sorrow had already entered, and he must not add to that sorrow, by mooting unpleasant questions.

He was away from Helen, and he would not return to London until she had gone back to Scotland, unless it might be to look for Harry Osborne, if he found reason to suspect he had made his way there in his absence.

For no other reason than that would he leave home, until Helen was safely at Inchcauldie. Then he would like to go up to town again, to see Lady Osborne, and have another week or two with Frederick.

In the mean time he would say nothing about Helen, and nothing about Grace. Grace was contented to wait for the present, and Archie, although not quite contented to wait, was unwilling to take any decisive

step that might complicate the troubles, already heavy enough at Stedleigh. His father himself had recalled him from London, and once removed out of Helen's way, and the danger of having his visits to her misconstrued, there was no immediate necessity for announcing his views concerning her.

His father was evidently anxious to have him near him, and was probably less eager about match-making, since his daughter's love affair had turned out so ill. Whether this was so or not, whether his father had other and very different reasons for bringing him back to Stedleigh, Archie argued the point his own way, as he went upon his homeward journey.

He was driving through his difficulties four in hand, but there was one little stumbling place where the wheels would not roll smoothly. One little black speck that would not be driven away, and that black speck was Angus Douglas.

Why was it he had come to London ? and what did he want to talk to his father of ? Would he write or go to Stedleigh, and would the letter or the visit relate to him ? These were the questions that would come up in spite of himself, and refused to be chased away. If Angus Douglas and his father were disposed to pull together regarding Helen, if his father had given Angus to understand he wished the match, and would try to further it, it would be impossible to postpone the conflict he had gone to London four days since to seek, and now so anxiously desired to avoid, on account of Marion's trouble. Marion's trouble was heavy and dire, far more heavy than his trouble. He could fight, if fight he must, with the odds on his side. The woman he loved was true to him. Come what would, Grace's faith would remain unshaken. That knowledge was a shield with which to cover his breast in the day of battle. But the man Marion loved had been false to her,

had broken his pledged word, and thrown her aside, that he might love another woman ; and Archie thinking of his sister, cursed Harry Osborne in his heart, as the train steamed into the station at Stedleigh. Mr. Douglas was on the platform when he stepped out.

“It’s all right Archie, when I see you here, but I feared your discretion if you met Osborne,” he said, as he shook his son by the hand.

“So you might, if I had met him father. How is my mother and Marion ?”

“Pretty well. How did you leave Helen ?”

“I saw her this morning, and she was as well as usual. But her father is at York Place.”

Mr. Douglas looked round at his son, but made no answer. They were making their way along the platform to the steps leading to the street, where the carriage waited, a footman and a porter following,

the latter carrying Archie's luggage. It was all fuss and hurry. The bell was ringing, and the train about to start again, when, running up the steps at the top of his speed, came Mr. Clifford. Mr. Douglas and Archie stepped back out of his direct view. His jovial face was all alright, and his jovial eye beaming just as usual, but they both shrunk instinctively from his loud toned sympathy.

If they met he would speak of Marion and Osborne. Silence on delicate matters the jolly parson did not understand, so they let him pass to take his place in the train, and then proceeding on their way to their carriage, entered it, and drove off to Stedleigh.

"This has been a disgraceful act of Osborne's, Archie," Mr. Douglas observed, as they rolled over the road. "I believe he intended nothing else when he left Stedleigh."

"I don't know about that. All I know

is he behaved like a rascal, and if I could have laid hands on him to-day, I'd have treated him like one," Archie answered, his indignation rising as he got near home.

"I am very glad you did not meet him. Such things only make matters more public, and it is talked about enough as it is."

Marion's being talked about, was a sore thorn in Mr. Douglas's side. He was not used to thorns, and did not bear them patiently. To have his daughter's name bruited round Stedleigh, to have people chattering of her and Harry Osborne, pitying her, and shrugging their shoulders, was a hard blow to her father's pride. He knew his private family affairs were canvassed at every dinner table in the neighbourhood, and discussed even in the farmers' kitchens. He would have been glad if it had been in his power to resent, and put a stop to the thousand tongues that babbled over the

concerns of Stedleigh; but he could not put a stop to them, and there was nothing left him but to case himself in his hard pride, and bear it in silence.

There was nothing further spoken between him and his son, after that allusion to the publicity of Marion's breach with her lover. Mr. Douglas leant back in the carriage, without uttering another word, and Archie leant forward, watching the hedgerows fly past, as the swift horses bore them to Stedleigh.

They passed up the wide avenue, under the spreading trees, and Archie was soon once more standing by his mother's side in one of the bay windows of the large drawing-room; the very window where he had left Harry Osborne sitting by Marion, four days ago.

"My father seems cut up by it," Archie said, as they stood discussing the one subject that was filling all their minds. "And you, too, mother, dear; it has worried you."

“Yes, I am worried for Marion’s sake. I don’t think she will recover the shock for a long time.” And then, after a few more words, they went up stairs together to Marion’s dressing-room, which she had never left since the intelligence of Harry’s desertion reached her.

“Here is Archie, Marion, dear,” Mrs. Douglas said, as her son followed her into the room.

She was lying on the sofa when they came in, but she rose, and came over to welcome him.

“It was so good of you to come to me, Archie, darling. I was longing to see you.”

She put up her poor pale, worn face to meet her brother’s kiss, and Archie, as he looked on it, cursed Harry Osborne again in his heart,—cursed him, but said never a word.

“Did you see any one in London before

you came away ?" she asked, still leaning on her brother's supporting arm.

" I did see two or three people, but not the one I wanted to see."

" I am glad of it."

" Then I am not glad of it ;" and Archie, giving another look at the pallid, patient face of his sister, went on in his quick, excited way,—" If I had met that rascally Osborne, I'd——" But his threat was cut short in the midst, for Marion's soft, white hand was laid against his lips.

" Hush, Archie, hush ! Who knows but he may have suffered too ?"

" Who cares about his sufferings ? he did not trouble himself about yours."

" Do not, Archie. It does no good to talk of him," Mrs. Douglas said.

" I don't want to talk of him. I want to forget him, and to see Marion forget him. If I were you, Marion, I'd think no more of him, and let the world see I thought no more of him, either."

“ I can bear it and be still,” Marion answered; “ but I cannot show fight.” And Archie felt there was never anything more true than that.

CHAPTER III.

THE ELECTION IN SIGHT. CLERICAL FRIENDS.
A DINNER INVITATION.

As Mr. Douglas had said, Marion became the staple subject of talk to the Stedleigh people. The news of the break up in her intended marriage, spread rapidly over the neighbourhood.

Common everyday occurrences get a share of gossiping attention in the country, and how much more this, which was a matter of rare interest? It was carried hither and thither on the lips of chattering idlers, tossed like a shuttlecock from battledore to battledore, in servants' halls and ladies' draw-

ing-rooms, at social gatherings and private dinner tables, until the whole Stedleigh world grew tired of the wonder.

Hitherto Stedleigh Manor had been a place held in a kind of respectful awe by its lesser neighbours. There were no money difficulties hanging over it; none of its acres carried the weight of a mortgage, nor were there family quarrels to discuss. Mr. Hensley had quarrelled with his nephew, and turned him out of doors; and people talked of it, of course; but they could find no such tattle regarding Stedleigh.

Various other country scandals had arisen about various other households, but yet there had never been any scandal respecting Stedleigh; nor was there any scandal now, but there was much painful public talk, much head-shaking, and shoulder-shrugging.

People went past Stedleigh, looking in curiously through the iron framework of the

gates, as if the shadow, and the stillness that always hung round the place, had something to do with the shadow that had fallen on Marion's heart, which was crying and famishing for her lost love. There were many who pitied her, and would have said a word of comfort to her, if they could, but she kept out of the way of comfort, and pity alike. The wound was too recent, and too sore to bear daylight. She took it to her heart and hid it, moaning over it in the long days, and the nights that never seemed to end ; and through it all, the little world around her went on talking of her, and blaming her absent lover.

Not even his own father had a word of excuse to offer for him. Mr. Clifford had gone to The Cliff, and touched upon the subject in his bold, off-hand way. The Admiral had stood upon the hearth rug, with his hands behind his back, declaring his son was a rascal—"a rascal, sir, and I'll have nothing to do with him." After that,

Mr. Clifford met Mr. Douglas in Stedleigh, and attempted to speak of it to him, but Mr. Douglas withdrew into his shell of pride, and killed the discussion on the spot. Archie had been less reticent: he told Mr. Clifford, and half-a-dozen others, as well, that Harry Osborne was a confounded scoundrel, and that it made him angry to speak of him—an assertion that no one, who saw his kindling eye, and the drawn muscles of his mouth, attempted to doubt for a moment.

In the middle of all this wondering excitement, came news of a different kind,—Mr. Brownlowe had resigned his seat, and Mr. Hamilton's son was to stand for Cranston. Next rose another report: Mr. Douglas, of Stedleigh, was coming forward in support of the liberal interest. The conservatives were not going to have it all their own way, and run round the course, to win at an easy heat! There would be a tough fight presently. Mr. Reddington was up, and alive, with all his bristles set, ready for

the battle, and Mr. Douglas, casting aside Marion's affairs for the moment, girded himself for the contest. He would not go into it with slack hands—he would vigorously put forth his strength, muster his votes, and then let the world judge which was the strongest man of the two.

Admiral Osborne had said he was old, that the labour of canvassing, and the anxiety consequent on the whole affair, would be too much for him. But Admiral Osborne was wrong, and he should live to see he was wrong.

There was a talk of taking Marion to Germany. Mrs. Douglas had said that change of air and scene would be of service to her, and Mr. Douglas had agreed to the idea. But Marion must not go to Germany now. Mrs. Douglas would be wanted to sit at the head of his table, and do the honours of Stedleigh. There must be electioneering dinner-parties. His friends and supporters would not be lessened by his displaying a generous

hospitality. Some one has said that the way to an Englishman's heart is through his stomach, and Mr. Douglas showed that he put some faith in it, by the arrangements he contemplated. Beef would be roasted, and wine would flow in Stedleigh, between this and the great polling day at Cranston. Many a glass our stout parson hoped to quaff at the Stedleigh dinners—our stout parson who was to vote for no one, and wished both sides well.

There he is this moment, standing in the Rectory drawing-room, filling up half the window with his full, large figure, and talking to Mr. Crawford, the sickly young parson from beyond Cranston, upon the subject of that same election.

“There will be a great stir about here presently. It will be a neck and neck race. Old Douglas is strong in tenantry, and young Hamilton is strong in friends. Beauchamp has declared for Hamilton, in spite of the hankering he has after Reddington's niece.

Gad ! if Douglas wins it will pay off the score he has against his opponent. I don't believe anything else made him stand."

"Do you think he will win?" Mr. Crawford asked, not approving of Mr. Douglas having that score against Mr. Hamilton, as a motive for standing, yet not quite liking to say so to his companion.

"That's more than I know. Some one else asked me the same question before, and I said I thought it was a pity they could not both win. They might make a kind of drawn game," he continued, laughing, "and each retire with their colours flying."

"That's a terrible business about Miss Douglas," Mr. Crawford said, dropping the election topic.

"Yes, terrible. He was a great fool, that Osborne. More weak than wicked, though, I think. The people here are all hard on him."

"Half the wickedness of the world proceeds from weakness," young Crawford rejoined.

“That’s a sentence fit for a moral essay. But, for my part, I don’t believe in the wickedness of the world. It’s a very good world, and a very jolly world, although it’s my business to throw stones at it fifty-two days in the year,” and the parson laughed again his jovial, merry laugh, and passed his hand across the bald spot in the middle of his head.

Mr. Crawford shook his head, and muttered something about its being a land of sorrow, and the flesh for ever warring against the spirit. Poor young fellow ! Delicate in constitution, and gentle in heart, his way in life had been along the flinty road, rather than through the green meadows. His weary, flagging feet, cut with the rough shingles of pain and poverty, longed for the soft paths whereon other men walked—longed for the little comforts, or delicate living necessary to his slender body and failing health ; and then in his trembling Christianity, his trembling dread of evil thoughts, and sinful desires, he

called that natural yearning—a yearning on which God looked, I doubt not, with forgiving eyes—a warring of the flesh against the spirit.

“The flesh warring against the spirit,” Mr. Clifford said, catching up the words, “I’d have no such thing. Let them make it up, and live in peace. Every one of us should live in peace with his neighbour—that’s the finest Christianity in the world.”

Mr. Crawford looked up at his brother clergyman’s grave mouth, and laughing eye. Was Mr. Clifford in jest or earnest? or did he see exactly what he was saying?

“I was not talking of neighbours, I was talking of individuals—our own flesh and our own spirit,” he said.

“Well, what difference does it make? A man has no neighbour half so near as himself, and if he does not agree with himself, the probability is, he will be quarrelling with half the world.”

Mr. Crawford took up his hat.

"I must be moving," he said.

"Come along, then; I'll go with you as far as the station. I may pick up some news about the election."

And the two gentlemen went arm and arm down the village, and up to the railway station.

They had to stop at the foot of the steps to let the passengers from the train that had just come in reach the street.

Mr. Clifford, nodding to this one or that as well-known Cranston or Stedleigh faces passed, cast his eyes presently on a stranger, and began wondering who he was. He was a tall, thin man, with high cheek bones, and a glance that shifted and looked down. He carried in his hand a small black leather bag, and made his way, with his scanty luggage to a fly that stood by the kerbstone, on the very edge of which Mr. Clifford was standing.

"Drive me to Stedleigh Manor," he said to the man as he closed the door; and the fly rolled away up the hill of Stedleigh.

“That’s a London agent come down about the election, I’ll bet half-a-crown!” Mr. Clifford said to his companion, as they mounted the steps.

“Very likely,” Mr. Crawford assented, stepping on in advance to reach the carriages.

All this time Archie Douglas was walking in the Rectory garden, strolling through the flower-beds with Grace Clifford.

“And you are really going canvassing?” Grace said, in answer to the news, that his father was to stand for Cranston.

“Really, and without a doubt. Shall I come to you for a vote?”

“I wish I had a dozen, Archie, for your sake,” she said.

“Would you actually march up to the poll, Grace?”

“Oh, you would have a private booth for the ladies, I suppose,” she said.

“That I would, and take all the votes myself—yours more especially. I must send you a rosette of the Douglas colours.”

“What are your colours, Archie, blue?”

“You are a political ignoramus, Grace. Blue are the tory colours. Ours are scarlet and white.”

“You are a liberal. What’s the difference.”

“Hang me, if I know!” he said, laughing outright. “I believe that what the one wants, the other won’t have, and that they only agree in one thing, a hard scramble for office.”

“Do come in to papa. He has a vote, if he would only give it; but he says he’ll vote for no one.”

“Where is he?”

“In the drawing-room, with Mr. Crawford.”

This was not the case as we know. When Grace and Archie entered the room, they found it empty.

“Mr. Crawford is gone, and papa walked with him to the train, I suppose; but he will be back shortly.”

“ I want to see him—not about the vote, though. My father wishes him to join us at dinner to-day. Has he any engagement?”

“ Not that I know of.”

“ You have no engagement, at any rate, and you must come, whether he does or not.”

“ Must—I will not have must,” she said, smiling at her lover.

How true he was—how good he was in her eyes, in comparison with that other lover, of whom not a word had been spoken, yet.

“ Must—there it is again,” he answered. “ You must come, and you must take off that hat of yours too. It puts you under a cloud. I can’t half see you.”

He put out his hand to untie the strings, and when she laid the objectionable hat upon the table, threw his arm round her waist, and sat down with her on the sofa.

“ Now about your coming to Stedleigh,

Grace. I want you especially to come to-day. It will do Marion good to see you. You must comfort her, and be a sister to her, as I mean you to be more fully, some day, soon.'

"Poor Marion. Oh, Archie, dear, I was so sorry for her. How does she bear it?"

"Wonderfully. She was always silent and quiet. She is a little more silent, and a little more quiet, that is all. What a dastardly scoundrel Osborne was."

"But was not Miss Douglas to blame?" Grace suggested, not willing to let all the evil lie at the door of an old friend, and perhaps unconsciously to herself, disposed to think ill of Helen, from that old feud regarding Archie.

"I scarcely think so; but it's hard to say," Archie answered; not quite so sure of Helen's good faith since he had seen his mother, and got from under the spell of his cousin's presence. "However, you must comfort Marion.

You must teach her to forget this man, Grace."

"I cannot teach her that. She will go on loving him. I know she will."

"She will not. We must all try to root him out of her mind. She cannot give her life up to repining after such a fellow as that."

"I know Marion better than you do, although you are her brother. How many women have gone on loving such men as Osborne."

"Would you love me, if I did by you as he has done by her, Grace? Would you love me if I left you for another woman?"

She hesitated and coloured.

"Did I not love you, when I thought you loved your cousin?" she said, with her eyes dropped upon her hand, which lay in her lap clasped in Archie's.

"I had not quite left you then, Grace. But would you love me if I left you now?"

His ear thirsted greedily for her to say yes ; and he knew she would say it, but he longed for it to come.

“ I would love you always. I have loved you always, and I must go on loving you. I could not help it.”

“ As I cannot help loving you Grace, I could not go away from you, even if I tried.”

He tightened his clasp round her, drawing her to his side, and kissing her, while he inwardly declared, that he at least would never be like Osborne—never be to Grace, what Harry had been to Marion. Come weal or woe, he would stand by her, and be true to her. She had loved him always, and must love him always. She had told him so herself, and she should never have cause to repent that loving. He was all in all to her now, and he would be all in all to her still, in the years to come, in that untried future which was beyond them. His father might object, but he would be firm, and

keep his word to Grace, in spite of all opposition.

“ Do you be true to me, Grace,” he said, “ I will be true to you. Neither of us two will ever learn the lesson of forgetfulness.”

“ We shall not have time to forget,” she answered ; “ we shall see each other so often. You are not going back to London any more ?”

“ Not yet, at all events ; but I may run up for a week or two, at the end of the season. There are one or two friends there, I should like to see again.”

“ What friends, Archie ?”

“ Frederick Osborne is one. I had right pleasant times with him when I could make a slip from my father, and the ogress in York Place.”

“ Do you mean your cousin ?”

“ No, no. Lady Mackenzie was the ogress. She used to watch me like a cat watching a mouse, and scold me when I failed to come.

I often wonder did she hunt old Sir Ranald off his legs that way."

Grace laughed. " You'll say I hunted you, presently."

" No—it was the other way. You were the hare that scampered off, and I was the dog that ran after her, and caught her. But now about my other friend, Grace. Guess who it is."

" I am sure I don't know."

" Lady Osborne, Harry's aunt by marriage. Such a beautiful woman as she is."

" Don't say that, Archie. I shall be jealous."

" Be jealous then. It is a great compliment to a fellow, when a woman gets jealous of him."

" Then I shall not pay you the compliment."

" I have often wished to talk to Lady Osborne about you Grace," he said, putting up his hand, and stroking her hair; " I would so much wish you to be friends. You have

no idea how kind she was about Marion. Poor Marion—remember you must comfort her, Grace.”

“ I will do all I can. I would have gone to Stedleigh at once, had it been sickness, or anything, but what it is that had befallen her. But at such times even a friend is scarcely welcome.”

“ You will be welcome, now. She told me to-day she would be glad to see you.”

“ What did your father say of Harry, Archie?”

“ Not very much. He seldom says much about anything, but I know he felt it keenly. However, the stir about this election is helping to divert his mind from it; and perhaps it is as well.”

“ Do you think he will be returned?”

“ I don’t know—I hope so. We have a good number of tenant voters, and that will do something for us. But what is keeping your father, Grace? I must go and leave

you, to give him my father's invitation. He'll be pretty sure to come, I suppose.

"Quite sure, I think. I shall go, at all events."

"Of course you will. If you did not, I'd—."

He rose from the sofa, without finishing the sentence.

"You would what?" she asked as they stood by the table, Archie holding his hat in his hand.

"Quarrel with you—and you could not afford that, you know," he said, with daring assumption, not to be wondered at, considering her late confessions.

"You could not afford it either," she answered, with a saucy show of triumph. For which he found it necessary to kiss her once more.

"My father is a magistrate, and if you say that again, I'll get him to put you in the stocks."

"Go home, Archie, and don't talk nonsense."

They are obsolete. There are no stocks now, but government stocks!"

"And military stocks," he called back, as he went out; thus depriving her of her woman's privilege, of having the last word.

CHAPTER IV.

AN ELECTIONEERING DINNER-PARTY—STORM
CLOUDS.

THE dinner-party at Stedleigh to which Archie had invited Mr. Clifford, was essentially a gentleman's dinner-party. Mrs. Douglas had appeared in her place at the head of the table, and then duly vanished with Miss Osborne, who came that day to Stedleigh, that all the world might know, Harry's misdeeds had not broken up the long-standing friendship, subsisting between the families.

Grace Clifford did not show at all, having had her dinner upstairs with Marion Douglas, Archie heroically submitting to the loss of

her society for his sister's sake. Mrs. Douglas had received her with marked kindness; kindness so plainly marked indeed, that it shewed Grace she was content with Archie's choice, and willing to share her son's love with her. The time had come to Mrs. Douglas, when she was to divide Archie's heart with another, when that other, was to hold the first place in his affections, and she stepped back gracefully into the second, saying to herself, it was well, and she was content, since Archie was happy.

Amongst the guests at the Stedleigh dinner-table was the stranger whom Mr. Clifford met at the railway station. He had stepped from the fly, with his black leather bag in his hand, passed it over to the footman who admitted him, and taken his seat in the drawing-room, with as much coolness as you take a chair in your own. And ten minutes before the dinner was announced, Mr. Clifford standing with one or two gentlemen round Mr. Douglas, who, as master of the house, had

his place right in the centre of the hearth-rug, was introduced to this same stranger, not as the London agent, he had fancied him to be, but as Mr. Douglas, of Inchcauldie.

As soon as the ladies had retired, the gentlemen set about making themselves at home. They were for the most part disposed to be sociable, and ready to enjoy the good wine, liberally provided for them. Their host was urbane and dignified, although his natural coldness threw him back occasionally into reserve. Archie had got especial directions to be attentive to his father's guests. Archie was far more popular than Mr. Douglas, and his popularity was to be brought into play presently. He was ready with a pleasant word, a quick rejoinder, or a laugh, never out of temper, except when he spoke of Harry Osborne, and Mr. Reddington had decided he would be a valuable ally, where votes were to be cajoled, or voters' wives and daughters chaffed, as he expressed it, into good humour. But just at the present moment Archie was

thinking more of his own affairs than of his father's election.

The eyes of old Angus Douglas, stealing side-long glances at him from the other side of the table, were not the eyes he best liked sitting opposite to. He had come to Stedleigh to shew his teeth about Helen. The probability was, his own father would shew his teeth likewise, and if so, it behoved Archie to look about for an armour of defence, or the ogress in York Place, would live to see him bound a sacrifice to the horns of the altar, in St. George's, Hanover Square. So it came to pass that Archie, thinking all these things, was silent, and it fell to Mr. Clifford's lot to do a good deal of the talking.

To say the truth, he had been invited by Mr. Douglas in order that he might amuse the guests. He was a capital person to get up a laugh, tell a good story, and set the ball of conversation rolling if it began to go slowly. There is nothing ties ephemeral everyday friends to our interests, so much as

a good dinner, a good glass of wine, or a pleasant evening. There is no man who shakes us so warmly by the hand when the parting hour comes, as the man who is half drunk at our expense. Temporary friendship was all Mr. Douglas needed from these men ; a friendship, that would bring a vote, or influence a voter. And for that temporary friendship, there was no cement so strong as a generous dinner, washed down by generous wine. His guests could not eat at his table, and then register their vote for his opponent, unless they argued as the army veteran, who was a freeman of Dublin city, argued once when taxed with ingratitude for feasting, and drinking, at the expense of the liberal candidate, and voting for the conservative, that he followed a soldier's custom, and foraged from the enemy's camp. But Mr. Douglas feared no such result as that, and sat calculating his friends' tenants, and the probable number of them each could influence, while he passed the decanters, and drank his wine.

“ Beauchamp has declared for Hamilton,” Mr. Clifford said, as the conversation turned on the election.

“ Has he?—are you sure of that?” Mr. Carruthers answered, from the other side of the table.

“ As sure as you are there: he told me himself.”

“ I knew he would,” Mr. Reddington cried from his seat near Mr. Douglas; “ I always knew he would, from the day we talked of the election in the hotel.”

“ You ought to have sent the ladies to him,” Mr. Clifford rejoined, winking at Mr. Carruthers; “ Miss Craig would have been a capital canvasser for Beauchamp.”

Mr. Reddington made a noise like a grunt of disapproval, but as this was not the time to take anything ill, which a man chose to say, he gave no more emphatic sign of displeasure, at his niece’s name being dragged up in their after dinner chat.

“ You have a vote yourself, Clifford,” ob-

served a Mr. Wilson, who sat beside Angus Douglas. "What do you intend to do with it?"

"I am not asking you what you intend to do with yours?" Mr. Clifford retorted. "That's not a bad joke, Wilson."

"I'll back Wilson," Mr. Carruthers said. "What about your vote, Clifford?"

"Just this, that I don't believe I shall vote at all. A man like me has no business with elections. I have enough to do to mind my parish."

"Ah, you are a sly dog, Clifford; you know well where the vote is going to," Mr. Wilson answered.

"I'll tell you what, I'll give it to Lord Palmerston to do as he pleases with, if he gives me a bishopric."

"Then I'd be safe to have it," Mr. Douglas rejoined, "as I am on his Lordship's side of the house."

"Or will be, if you get in," Mr. Clifford said laughing, and then muttered in an under

tone to his next neighbour, "did you ever hear of the old woman who counted her chickens before they were out of the shell?"

"What's that?" Mr. Reddington asked.

"Only a little illustration, Reddington," Mr. Clifford answered carelessly; "and now I'll give you a fact; facts are better than illustrations any day."

"A fact about what?" Mr. Reddington asked, his ears set, expecting to hear news of somebody's movements, boding good or ill to the business he had in hand.

"Just this fact, that these strawberries are excellent—try them," and Mr. Clifford helping himself to some, handed the rest to Mr. Reddington.

But Mr. Reddington declining the offered civility, leant back in his chair, in an attitude of intense disgust.

Mr. Douglas laughed, everybody laughed, and Mr. Carruthers began telling a story of a quiz, something like that, which had been played upon somebody or other, and then

Archie Douglas roused himself, and shoved in his oar, and so the talk went round.

“This is rather out of your line, Angus,” Mr. Douglas said to his cousin, later in the night, seeing that he sat without taking much wine, thrumming his fingers on the edge of the table. “You have not many dinner parties at Inchcauldie.”

“No, late hours and racketting don’t agree with me, you see,” he answered, while he made a mental calculation, as to the probable cost of the wine, drank that day at Stedleigh; a thing he by no means arrived at, for he had no notion of the actual price paid for the rare vintage the Stedleigh cellars could boast of.

“You lead a very quiet life in the Highlands, I suppose,” Mr. Wilson observed, thinking it time to say something to his silent neighbour.

“Well, you see Inchcauldie is not just in the Highlands.”

“Indeed,” Mr. Wilson answered, a little

put out by his companion's reply, and the manner of it. "But you have shooting there, I presume?"

"Aye, some."

"I think I'll set my face towards Scotland next season," Mr. Wilson said, trying again. "I had very good sport there, the year before last."

"Had you. I am thinking of letting Inchcauldie myself, next season. A man may as well make a penny by his game as not."

- This he said to let Mr. Wilson know there was no use in pushing an acquaintance with him, in hopes of getting a turn on the heather. If he did not want something, why was he talking so much?

"Well, I hope you may get a good tenant, Mr. Douglas," and Mr. Wilson turning away, began speaking across the table to his host, while Mr. Reddington, wondered to himself whether the strange old man was a fox or a fool.

It was a merry party, a very merry party, and by the time the first person shewed signs of moving, the most of the company had a good deal of wine in their heads, and Mr. Reddington was fast asleep.

“I am sorry our friend the Admiral was not here to-night,” some one observed, who would have known better than to say a word, if he had been quite sober.

“It is a pity, but he is not very well,” Mr. Douglas answered, all dignity now, without urbanity.

“I—I beg your pardon, I forgot,” the stammering bacchanalian muttered, making the blunder worse by the apology.

“Look at Reddington,” Mr. Clifford interposed quickly, as he rose to his feet. “He is as sound as a top, and as drunk as a skipper.”

A roar of laughter at Mr. Reddington’s expense, followed Mr. Clifford’s remark.

“What is it? What is it?” Mr. Reddington exclaimed, roused by the laugh, and too

much bewildered by the fumes of the wine, to have his brain clear.

“I bet half a crown that we could not laugh loud enough to wake you,” Mr. Clifford said, with a wink at the company, at the same time tossing up the coin in his hand.

“Then you lost it,” Mr. Reddington growled, gruffly.

He had not wished Mr. Douglas to invite Mr. Clifford, as he had a shrewd notion, the jolly parson could laugh at the entire table, host and all.

“Not yet, Reddington. The fellow who laughed the loudest was to get the money, and as I laughed the loudest, I won the bet.”

Another roar hailed the parson’s success in mystifying poor Mr. Reddington. And Mr. Clifford laughing himself, tossed up his half-crown again, and put it in his pocket.

After this the party fairly broke up.

Archie Douglas ran off to get Grace, as her father was waiting for her. Archie gallantly helped her on with her muffling, and kissed her on the landing, before he led her down stairs.

“Here she is quite safe, Mr. Clifford, and well wrapped up. I settled all the fixtures myself, except the bonnet,” he said, as he handed Grace over to her father, but he told nothing about the kissing.

The company were all gone. Archie had slipped up to Marion’s dressing-room, to have a word with her and his mother, about Grace and Angus Douglas, and then he had gone to bed. Marion and Mrs. Douglas soon followed his example, leaving Mr. Douglas, and his cousin still sitting in the dining-room, amidst the scattered debris of the late convivial gathering. Peaches and strawberries, grapes, empty wine glasses, and decanters partly drained, were scattered over the table. Here and there were little splashes of wine, shewing that the hands

which held the decanters had not got steadier as the night advanced.

At one end of the room Mr. Douglas sat, with his elbow leaning on the table, and his hand shading his eyes from the gaslight, that blazed above his head. Near him was Angus Douglas, with a hand upon each knee, just as he used to sit at Inchcauldie, and just as Archie had seen him, when Helen led him into the back drawing-room in York Place.

“I am afraid you did not enjoy yourself to-night, Angus. If I had known you were coming, I should not have had such a party to meet you. But let us make up for it now, and have a quiet glass together.”

Mr. Douglas took his hand from his forehead, and caught up a decanter.

“None for me, Archibald,” Angus said, shaking his head. “It does not agree with me.”

“You don’t like it as well as Inchcauldie

whiskey. But you might take a glass to brighten you."

"Aye, but I don't want brightening. I was just thinking this evening, what a poor time you must have had at Inchcauldie, when you were used to such gatherings as this, to-night."

"This is a special time, Angus," Mr. Douglas replied, leaning his head on his hand again. "You don't understand, man, it's the election, that is the cause of it. I am going to stand for Cranston."

"I don't think much of elections, or much of members of parliament either. A vote is no good to a person now, things are so strict."

"Do you mean the bribery laws?" Mr. Douglas asked, wondering would Angus actually contemplate selling a vote.

"Aye, and every one have their eyes open."

"Hamilton will keep a close eye on me I suppose, and I must return the compli-

ment. But what do you think of Stedleigh?"

"Stedleigh is a very grand place, and it needs to be a grand place, seeing all it has to keep up. I saw as many idle scamps of servants since I came here to-day, as I have labourers at Inchcauldie."

Mr. Douglas smiled :

"We can't attend ourselves, you know, Angus. You'll soon get accustomed to it. Archie must take you over the place for the first two or three days, and you will give me your opinion as to how I work my land."

"Work your land. I have an opinion about that already. Didn't I see two stout fellows, rolling a great roller, over all that beautiful grass on the lawn, that would soon spring up if they let it alone, and feed no end of cattle."

"But I don't want it to spring up. I keep all the grass near the house cut, and rolled. You don't suppose I'd have cows looking in at my drawing-room windows!"

“Aye, but you wanted my opinion, and, now that you have it, you don’t like it. I tell you it’s waste, and it is waste!”

“Well, you’ll not find the land wasted elsewhere.”

“May-be not, but I have no time to spare, you see. I’ll just stay over to-morrow to rest, and then I must get back to Helen !”

“How is Helen? I had scarcely time to ask you !”

“Pretty well. It was about her that I came here,” Angus answered, coming round at last to the point of his visit.

“Yes,” Mr. Douglas said. “I have been anxious about her, too. As soon as this election business is over, Archie must make up for lost time !”

“Aye, but if he is not on for the thing at all ?” Angus said, slowly.

“Who says he is not ?” Mr. Douglas asked, removing his hand from his forehead, and looking round at his cousin.

“How can I tell who says it? May-be it was Helen, may-be it was Lady Mackenzie, or may-be it came into my own head.”

“I tell you what, Angus, I am not a man who says a thing, and does not do it. Rest at peace until after the election, and Archie shall marry Helen!”

“You see the election is nothing to me, Archibald. What I want settled, I want settled. Now, I can’t go back all the way to Scotland, and come back all the way here, after the election. Journeys cost money—and, as to staying away, you see it doesn’t answer—the place won’t mind itself.”

Angus Douglas was as intractable as ever. There was no getting him to go through the gate, when he chose to jump the fence.

“You won’t wait. Then, what do you want me to do?”

“Just what you like. I’m going to take Helen back to Scotland the beginning of the week. I’m getting an old man now,

Archibald, and I must get her settled before I die."

"Of course you must. If you stay another week, I'll arrange with Archie, and we can have a quiet wedding up in London. I don't want to have any stir here, as things stand now with Marion."

"Aye," Angus answered.

"Well, will you stay the other week?"

"Didn't I tell you I could not?"

"Then you mean to force me to speak to Archie at once?"

"Just as you like."

"It seems to me as if it was to be just as you like," Mr. Douglas said, with half-checked anger. "It would be better for you to end the whole thing by selling Inchcauldie to me."

He did not half like this troublesome old man. Nor did he half like his daughter, since the affair with Osborne, although no living ear had ever heard him say so.

"No, Inchcauldie goes with Helen, and

Helen goes with Inchcauldie!" Angus said, falling back on the fiat he had issued in Scotland. "I am an old man, and I must have her settled before I die. I must have her settled, as I said to Ranald Douglas before I came away."

"Ranald Douglas! I thought you had done with Ranald Douglas!"

"Aye!" Angus said, a smile gathering round his cunning old mouth. "You thought that, did you. I never part friends that way."

"You might have trusted to me, Angus. I said I would bring this marriage about, and I will. You know as well as I do, Archie is a better match for Helen, than Douglas of Kilfin."

"She might have better than either of them, for that matter, as you know, Archibald."

"Do you mean Harry Osborne. I can't believe that Helen would do that."

"I did not say she would. I said she might, if she liked."

“If she did the whole world would say she took him away from Marion.”

“I’m sorry for it, Archibald—but, you see, she could not help it. It’s just a pity, she is so handsome.”

Mr. Douglas looked at him. What did he mean. Was that last sentence a covert triumph in his daughter’s beauty, or did he really mean it was a pity it had caused Marion’s unhappiness? But Angus sat with his hands on his knees, defying scrutiny, by his impenetrable face.

“It is a pity,” Mr. Douglas said. “A pity for Osborne’s sake, but not for Archie’s.”

There was silence for a moment. Mr. Douglas again leaning his head on his hand, and Angus still sitting with his hands upon his knees.

“I suppose, Angus,” Mr. Douglas said, looking up, presently, “that this had better be, as you say, settled at once.”

“If you choose, Archibald. I am going

to Scotland, and I'll take Helen with me next week."

"Then I'll speak to Archie to-morrow. You can take him up to London with you, if you like, although I can badly spare him now at the election."

"Aye, if he'll come."

"He will go," Mr. Douglas said, positively.

He had had trouble enough of late, and he would not suffer Archie to add to that trouble. On every account he would rather things had remained as they were, until after the election. But, if Angus Douglas chose to have it otherwise, he could not prevent it. He had spoken on behalf of his daughter, and he had a right to speak.

It was many months since Mr. Douglas had made the compact with him at Inchcauldie, regarding Archie, and that compact had not been fulfilled yet. Part of it was not from Archie's delay, and part of it was. Helen had been prevented by her

father's ill-health from coming to Stedleigh at Christmas. But, on the other hand, she had been three months in England—three months in Archie's society, and yet he had not spoken one word of love to her.

Mr. Douglas had thrown them together at Stedleigh, but Archie had been silent. He had thrown them together in London, and Archie had been silent still. Mr. Douglas knew as well as we know it, that Archie did not love this girl, but he did not know that he loved anyone else. His attentions to Helen in London—forced as they had been—must form the basis of an argument to induce Archie to marry her. He had misled Helen, and he must not desert her now. That old, old longing for Inchcauldie, must be gratified at any cost. The time was come for the fulfilment of his own desire, as well as of that promise he had given his father on his death-bed.

He had said to Angus Douglas, that he would speak to Archie to-morrow, and he

would speak. The battle which Archie went to London to begin was imminent now. Clouds were gathering round Stedleigh, clouds and thick darkness, beyond which we cannot see our way.

CHAPTER V.

THE BURSTING OF THE STORM.

THE father and son were together in the library at Stedleigh. They were standing by the fire place face to face, Mr. Douglas in the middle of the rug looking stern and masterful, one hand in his pocket, and the other holding a pencil, which he pointed now and then at his son, as if to give strength and emphasis to his words. Archie stood a little to one side, with his shoulder against the wall, and his arm leaning on the end of the chimney piece.

Without, through the open window, might

be seen Angus Douglas, wandering about over the grass, which the men had been rolling the day before. He carried his hands behind his back, and his eyes bent upon the ground, except when he lifted them now, and then, to glance sideways into the library window.

As yet there had been no actual angry words spoken between Mr. Douglas and his son, for so far the subject had been met by young Douglas with signs of dissent rather than with positive denial; but no one who looked in his face could doubt for a moment that the denial would come. He had come prepared to be resolute regarding Helen—to stand up for his right of choice, for his right to refuse to join his fate with a woman he did not love.

The presence of Angus Douglas at Stedleigh, and the receipt of his father's message, were enough to give him a pretty good idea of what that message portended. He had told his mother he thought the battle he had been

anxious to fight in London, was to be fought now at Stedleigh, that he had made up his mind not to marry Helen, and he would not marry her. So much as this he had said in the drawing-room, and then he walked into the library to hear what his father had to say.

Mr. Douglas received him as a son should be received, who had as yet committed no offence, speaking at first of things of no real moment, as men usually do before they open a doubtful subject. He alluded to the election, and told Archie he would be expecting him to take much of the labour off his hands, that is, he said, with a half smile, if Mr. Reddington's energy leaves us any work to do.

Then he slid off gently to Angus Douglas, and told Archie, with another half-smile, of how Angus desired that he should turn the Stedleigh lawn into meadow for grazing cattle. It was all light skirmishing for so far, but when his father pushed away some papers he

had been sorting on Archie's entrance, and moved over to the rug opposite his son, Archie knew the heavy fire was coming. And it did come, slowly at first, rolling from far away, like distant thunder.

“Angus and I were talking of you last night, Archie — talking of you, and Helen too.”

“Why of me and Helen? The subjects are not much connected, I should think,” and Archie glanced up at his father’s face with a look that boded opposition.

Mr. Douglas read the look, and grew grave. The little attempt at half-stagnant mirth vanished, and the tone of his voice altered.

“I thought you wished them connected subjects,” he said. “Have you changed your mind?”

“I do not often change my mind: I like Helen as a cousin, but I like her no more than that.”

“Come, Archibald, you are not going to turn Harry Osborne on my hands?”

Archie reddened. His father had called him "Archibald," a name he never used except when displeased, and he had flung a sidelong slur upon him, in seeming to believe he had done ill by Helen. But he was determined not to be angry yet.

"I don't understand you, father," he said; "I gave Helen no promise."

"There are things as binding as promises to an honourable man." And then Mr. Douglas fairly wound himself up, and made a speech.

He fell back on Archie's companionship with his cousin in Scotland—on his attention to her at Stedleigh, and his attention in London. No one could misunderstand these things. No man could suppose himself free to act such a part, and then rely on the fact of having made no promise.

Archie met his arguments, and cancelled them point by point. His attentions in Scotland had been more to his gun than to Helen. He had been with her in the evenings, but

what else was he to do with himself, shut out from other society? At Stedleigh she had been a cousin and a guest. And as to London, he said, "I deny I was attentive to her in London. No fellow has to be driven to the house of a woman he loves by a cart whip. And I was dragged twenty times to York Place by you, and dread of the tongue of that old Lady Mackenzie, when I would rather have been anywhere else."

Mr. Douglas turned and walked the length of the library, and then came back again to the charge. But Archie met him with an eye that never lowered its look, and a resolution that never quailed.

Mr. Douglas was not a man accustomed to have his words questioned, or his wishes set at nought by his own son. He grew stern and angry, not with hot, quick anger, but with hard, cruel wrath. Was he to be baited and bandied words with, by his own flesh and blood? Was the son, who owed him obedience, to fling back his commands in his

teeth? He had promised Angus Douglas this marriage should be a thing accomplished, and he would keep his promise. He could not bring himself to go forward, and say quietly, "My son says no to my yes, consequently my yes must fail, while his 'no' stands good." It was plain that one of them must lose in this contest, but that one should not be him. Archie behaved ill to Helen, and he must marry her. Mr. Douglas had not believed this last night, but he believed it now in the moment of bitter rage. Inchcauldie was under his hand, he could almost touch it with his finger. Inchcauldie, that coveted piece of moorland, dearer to him than all his rich possessions. Was he to let it slip away again beyond his reach, to gratify the whim of a boy, who chose to refuse a woman, that many another man would be proud to gain? That long-past death-bed promise, rose up to strengthen his indomitable resolve, if such resolve needed strengthening.

Mr. Douglas paced the room again, and

again returned to his son. Still stern and masterful, still firm, and fixed in his design, his voice waxed stronger and harder. The lines round his mouth gave no sign of yielding, and his words were bitter as gall. Cruel words, that stung and threatened, until they raised the quick fiery anger of his son. Hot words dropped from Archie's lips, the tide of indignation and opposition rising higher and higher.

Angus Douglas of Inchcauldie, heard the raised voices of father and son, as he wandered over the lawn, with his hands still behind his back. Traynor heard them in his favourite place in the hall, as he stood looking through the narrow window at the side of the entrance door. Mrs. Douglas heard them too, coming from the drawing-room, to the dining-room, and then back again, as she had done half-a-dozen times since Archie had gone into the library. Anxious, watchful, frightened, she paused a moment at the dining-room door to listen. Should she go in and try to make

peace between them? Dread of her husband restrained her, and, while she stood still and hesitated, there came a sudden silence, like the lull of the wind after a storm, and then through the lull she heard the sound of Mr. Douglas's voice, speaking in set, concentrated accents. Archie's voice answered, stern too, from the very absence of passion; and then Mr. Douglas spoke again.

It made her thrill and shudder. Men's anger, burning hot and fierce, is too like a woman's wrath, to bring much dread.} {But those calm, stern tones terrified her. Traynor looked round sideways, and saw her crossing the hall to the library. She would go in and stand between them—go in and make peace, if peace was not past the making; but before she had time to reach the door, it opened suddenly from the inside, and Archie came out, pale with suppressed anger, and a blaze of fire in his eye. She caught a glimpse of her husband standing by the hearth, facing the door, watching his son as he went, his eye

and mouth set and hard. Then the library door closed, and she and Archie were together in the hall.

“What is the matter, Archie? What is the matter?”

“Not much, mother,” Archie answered, a sight of Traynor making him keep his presence of mind. “I am going to London.”

They went into the dining-room, and closed the door.

“You must not go, Archie,” his mother cried, clinging to his arm; “you cannot quarrel with your father, you must obey him.”

“It is impossible, when he wants me to marry Helen Douglas.”

Even Mrs. Douglas shrank from that, since Harry’s love for her had come to light.

“Is there no other way?”

“No other way, mother, dear. I must go now. I will write to you from London.”

“But I don’t understand it, Archie,” she said, clinging to him still—“Is it all about Helen?”

“No, not all about Helen—partly about Grace.”

“Oh! don’t go, Archie—don’t go!” and she wound her arms round his neck, and began crying in her impulsive Irish way.

“Mother, don’t! I beg of you, don’t! I must go, he says I shall not stay here,” Archie answered, more touched by his mother’s tears than by his father’s anger. “Will you come to Marion?” and half persuaded, half led by her son, she went out past the curious Traynor, still watching out of the hall window, and looking sideways at his mistress and his young master, not by any means clear what it was all about.

In Marion’s dressing-room the three sat down together and talked it over, Archie and his sister soothing Mrs. Douglas into quiet, although Marion’s own hand trembled, and her face was very white.

Archie showed them that he could not stay at Stedleigh. His father and he had had such words as put it out of the question. He

must leave the house, unless he chose to go down again, and say he was conquered, and would submit to give up Grace and marry Helen. Grace, who clung to him, and trusted him with such a true faith.

“We will get it settled presently. When papa’s anger goes off we shall get it settled,” Marion said. “You shall not be long away, Archie.”

“Perhaps not, who knows, Marion? But I’ll have a run down to see you, in spite of the world. I cannot live long away from you, my mother, and Grace.”

He made a move as if to go.

“Oh! no, no, Archie—you must not go!” his mother cried, clinging to him again.

“It must be, mother, for a little while—it really must,” and then he kissed his sister, and went out, followed by his mother, leaving Marion sobbing, with her face buried in her hands.

“You will send my things to the railway, mother, for the four o’clock train?” Archie

said, as he stood on the lobby, with his arm round his mother's waist. "I shall call at the Rectory before I go."

"And will you really leave me, Archie?"

"I cannot help it, mother, but we shall meet soon. My father will give in when he sees he cannot have his way."

"No, no, he will not; he is too fixed and resolute for that," she said.

"I am fixed and resolute too. I will not marry Helen Douglas!"

"I wish she had never come here, trouble has followed her footsteps," Mrs. Douglas answered, bitterly.

"It almost seems so, mother. But now I must go. I shall write to you from London to-morrow, and I shall be down very soon."

She kissed him, and tried to keep him, but he gently disengaged her arms from about him, and ran down stairs—past the library door, where his father stood yet on the hearth, angry, silent, and colourless—past the curious

Traynor on his post by the window, and Angus Douglas still pacing on the lawn. And so on down the avenue, and away to the Rectory.

The whole thing had been sudden, although not quite unexpected. The presence of Angus Douglas at Stedleigh had warned Archie the day before that a storm was coming, and he had gone into the library with his mind made up to meet it. He had fought the battle, and, for so far, come off victorious: if either party can be said to win, where the fight is between father and son.

Archie looked back upon it all, as he took the high road to the Rectory; but the glance did not satisfy him. His father had been unreasonable in his demand that he should marry Helen, and stern in his way of enforcing it. But had he been quite free from blame? He had been hot and fierce, too hot and fierce he feared now, as his anger began to cool, and gave him time to think. But had he not cause to be hot and angry? And

as he thought of the cause he set his face hard again, and walked on more rapidly.

He would tell it all to Mr. Clifford. He had engaged himself to Grace without either the knowledge of her father or his own. His father knew it now, and it was but fair that Grace's father should know it likewise. He might not be satisfied with Grace for having kept it a secret from him; but Archie would take it upon himself, and bear Mr. Clifford's anger, if he saw fit to be angry. Archie reflected further, that Mr. Clifford would probably refuse to ratify his daughter's engagement, seeing that Mr. Douglas would not be willing to give his consent to the marriage. All this he had to meet and combat, in order to set things right before he left Stedleigh.

When he reached the Rectory gate he found it swinging open, as if some person had just driven in or driven out, for the track of carriage wheels were visible in the avenue. As he went up to the house he saw Mr. Clif-

ford himself, looming tall and large against the drawing-room window. He nodded familiarly as Archie drew near, and gave his hand a friendly grasp, when the servant ushered him into the drawing-room.

“How are you, after all the wine you drank last night? But I suppose you think I did more in that way myself?” he said, in his ringing, cheery voice, as Archie joined him in the window.

“Mr. Reddington was about the worst of us,” Archie said; and then, glancing round at Annie and Johnnie, who were busy playing on the floor with the cushions of the sofa, he added, “I want to speak a word or two with you, Mr. Clifford.”

“That has a very business beginning,” Mr. Clifford said smiling. Thinking Archie was coming looking after that vote of his, of which they had been speaking at Stedleigh the night before. “Run off you youngsters and tell Jane to send in a glass of wine,” the youngsters scampered off accordingly.

“Now Archie, what can I do for you?”

“Perhaps a good deal, perhaps nothing at all Mr. Clifford. I called to tell you of something which has occurred at Stedleigh.”

“Nothing wrong, I hope.”

“Why just this,” Archie said. “We have been rather unfortunate in the matrimonial way there of late, and now I have run my ship against the rocks myself.”

“How is that?”

“My father and I are at loggerheads about my cousin. He wants me to marry her, and I won’t marry her.”

“Pooh, you are a foolish boy that won’t touch plum pudding, when plum pudding is offered to him, but will steal it if he gets a chance. If you were told you should not have her, you would be going mad to get her. She is a nice girl, a very nice girl, Archie.”

“And you think I ought to obey my father?”

“Of course I do,” Mr. Clifford answered, not willing to lose Mr. Douglas’s friendship, by fostering rebellion in his son.

“Aye, but suppose I love another girl Mr. Clifford.”

“That’s Harry Osborne’s talk, Archie; come be wise, it’s a pity to quarrel with your father.”

“I don’t know whether you will be angry or not, Mr. Clifford,” Archie said out boldly, “but I do love another woman. I have asked another woman to be my wife, and that other woman is your daughter.”

Mr. Clifford drew back a step in surprise.

“Here’s a chance,” he thought. Obedience wore a different aspect now.

“You are not going to order me for execution, are you?”

“Not a bit of it,” the rector said, slapping his young friend on the shoulder, “Archie my fine fellow, I shall be proud of you for a son-in-law.”

“Aye, but about your advice,” Archie said malignantly.

“I did not know how things stood when I gave it. I am not speaking of Grace mind in this, but asking a woman is a very serious thing. A man when once he does it, should be prepared to carry it through. I thought the fancy you spoke of, was a mere passing affair, easily quashed. I had no idea there was an engagement you know.”

“Well, if my father won’t give his consent, what am I to expect from you?”

“He’ll come round, he’ll come round, and if he does not,—”

“Well?”

“We will do without him that’s all. I have no right to stand between Grace and her own way of finding happiness, no more than your father has a right to stand between you and your happiness. And now let us have a glass of wine, and tell me as we drink it how you two managed to keep this so slyly between yourselves.”

Archie took the wine, and told his story, Mr. Clifford laughing, and joking in high glee ; still muttering to himself as he thought of Grace's luck, "Here's a chance, and no mistake about it." He had got his fingers on Archie, and he should not wriggle through them as Harry Osborne had wriggled through Marion's. Mr. Douglas's friendship was a very good thing, a thing worth cultivating to a certain extent. It involved good dinners, and good wine, and Mr. Clifford we know was not a man to despise these advantages. But to give up his hold upon Archie, would be paying rather dear for Mr. Douglas's friendly hospitality.

He had his family to provide for. Three daughters were a heavy weight round a man's neck. His sons could provide for themselves. Tom with all his wilfulness, had done so already, and was storing money in the Melbourne bank. George had been squeezed through Cambridge, and was now squeezed into a curacy in the north of England, while

he waited for the death of the old rector, who held the living in his uncle's gift. Johnnie would come on presently, and be squeezed into some place else, and then Mr. Clifford looking back on his daughter's luck, could not but think his family were fortunate. The world was a very good world still to Mr. Clifford. A sunny valley, with soft pathways for his feet, that kept them from the broken shingles where Mr. Crawford journeyed.

Mr. Clifford's thoughts were running on blithely, while Archie told that story of his, which had such a pleasant ending for his hearer, and they talked on until the clock on the mantel piece striking three, made Archie start from his chair.

"It's three o'clock, and I must catch the four o'clock train," he said.

"What are you going off in such a hurry for?"

"I don't want to stay here too long to make matters worse with my father. He might think I did it in defiance, and Stedleigh is

hot enough for me just now. Where is Grace?"

Mr. Clifford rang the bell and sent for her.

"Your mother will be able to make peace, or Marion will manage it," he said, still standing by the bell.

"I hope so, but come what may, I will never desert Grace."

Then Grace herself came in, and interrupted the conversation.

"I had no notion you were here, Archie," she said, holding out her hand.

Archie took it, and kept it clasped in his. "Your father and I have had a talk, Grace, he knows everything now," and Grace colouring to her brow, turned away her flushed face from her father's eye.

"Don't be frightened Grace. I have said yes to it all," Mr. Clifford said, laying his hand on his daughter's shoulder approvingly, but not so forcibly as he laid it on Archie's. "And now I'm off. You two can talk it over together."

Mr. Clifford stepped out of the room, and Archie had his arm round Grace's waist, before he closed the door.

"Grace, my own darling Grace," he whispered.

She was dearer to him now than she had ever been. Had he not fought for her, and won her, held to her truly and stedfastly, in spite of his father's anger, and Helen Douglas's charms? He took her to his heart and kissed her; and while she lay in his arms told her all that had passed at Stedleigh, and that he must leave it, until his father's wrath got cold.

"But will it ever get cold, Archie?" Grace questioned, trembling.

"Yes dear, it will," he said, "of course it will, when he sees there is no use in carrying a high hand. I'll be in Stedleigh in a month, I'll engage."

He was trying to comfort Grace, although he by no means believed what he was saying. Not one month but many months might pass

before he and his father were reconciled. Men of his inflexible purpose do not bend so easily. Archie could not see his way clear out of the wood, but he was endeavouring to make it seem clear to Grace, and it was getting pretty clear to her under the roseate painting of her lover, when Mr. Clifford put in his head, to warn them it was time to part, or Archie would lose the train.

The interruption was not a minute too soon, for the bell was ringing as Douglas got his ticket.

“ You run for it, Archie,” Mr. Clifford cried, who had accompanied his intended son-in-law to the station, and Archie sprang into a carriage, as the guard was closing the door.

“ Good bye my boy, I shall keep up Grace’s heart for you,” the rector said, thrusting his hand through the window. “ You’ll drop her a line, to say how you got up.”

“ I should like to write to her, if you have no objection,” Archie answered, eagerly.

"I never do things by halves," Mr. Clifford replied, with an air of generosity. "Never. You have my consent to correspond, as well as my consent for the rest."

Archie wrung his hand gratefully, as the whistle sounded, and the train moved on.

"Let him write to be sure," Mr. Clifford thought, as he walked home through the village. "Nothing ties a fellow up like pen and paper."

CHAPTER VI.

**BACK IN JERMYN STREET—LADY OSBORNE
WITH A NEW STRING TO HER BOW.**

ARCHIE found himself in London a little before eight o'clock. The first thing he did was to drive to the hotel in Jermyn Street, secure his old quarters, eat his dinner, and then walk down to Frederick Osborne's chambers.

Frederick was not at home. "He might be in in a hour," the woman said, "or he might not be in for half the night; she knew nothing about him." The old dame was evidently out of temper, as we all know old dames are apt to be, but young dames

never are of course. So Douglas, not caring to ask questions that would only bring unsatisfactory replies, left his card with a few lines in pencil on the back, telling Osborne if he came in in time, to come up to Jermyn Street that night, and if he did not, to run up to breakfast in the morning.

Having settled this to his satisfaction, he strolled back leisurely to his hotel, and sat himself down to think, not because he wished to think, or had anything pleasant to think about, but because he must think, whether he would or not. He looked back over the troubled track of the past week or two, lying as it was all in shadow, with only one spot of light to brighten the picture, and that was where Grace Clifford's face peeped in.

Troubles are said never to come alone. There is some invisible chain of attraction that always drags one sorrow on the steps of another. Harry's desertion of Marion had been rapidly followed by his own expulsion from Stedleigh. It was not pleasant for him

to go over word for word as near as his memory allowed him; every sentence that had passed between him and his father. He did not like dwelling on his angry demands, or his angry threats if those demands were not complied with, and he tried hard to put the subject away from him, and look forward instead of backwards.

What should he do next? He could not stay in London doing nothing, until his father thought fit to step down off the pedestal of his wrath, supposing he ever did step down off it. He could not sit there for a month, two months, or goodness knows how long, occupying costly rooms, and eating costly dinners, without the means of paying for them. His purse was weak enough when he left Stedleigh, but it would be still weaker presently, if he adopted this mode. In fact, he did not think he could stick to it for many days to come; and when he did get over those few days, what was he to do at the end of them, unless he eat and drank his watch

and chain, his rings, and breast pin, and diamond studs? He had heard of people living on such things, and things far less valuable, during rainy weather. He remembered how Pickwick's friend, Jingle, lived on an umbrella for a week, and he was much better off than Jingle, seeing he had more valuable property than an umbrella to turn to. He felt disposed to be ironical against his own poverty, as he compared himself to Jingle, and bitter against his father, for casting him off without resources.

He had threatened him with exclusion from his presence as long as he chose to disobey his wishes. Archie priding himself on his manhood, declined to be put to stand in the corner like a naughty child, and met this threat with a counter threat, declaring he would leave Stedleigh altogether.

“ Go where you like, and live where you like,” his father had said, as they parted; “ but it shall not be at my expense.”

Doubtless Mr. Douglas thought he would

starve him into submission, as people starved citadels long ago, till the governor delivered the keys. Be that as it would, Archie was not starved yet, and like the citizens, before hunger sets in, he was active for resistance.

“What do you intend to do?” Osborne asked him, when he dropped in about ten o’clock that night, and heard the story.

“Just nothing at all. What can I do? I have shipped my oars, and I’ll let the boat drift.”

“You have made the deuce’s own mess of it, Douglas, in quarrelling with your father.”

“I could not help it. I never said ‘no’ to him in my life before, but I must disobey him, now.”

“That’s just where the mischief lies. You all allowed him to be too much the master. I saw well enough he was head and tail in his own house. It’s sheer folly to suppose you can let a man have his way for years in little things, and then make a stand when

he wants to have his way in great things."

"You don't mean that I should have thwarted him about trifles?"

"It depends upon what you call trifles. Some men might have called it a trifle, to have been asked to marry so handsome a girl as Miss Douglas. But you don't call it a trifle."

"Nonsense, Osborne. It's no trifle to be asked to give up a girl you like, for a girl you don't like."

"Faith! I don't know, Archie. I never liked any girl, so I can't tell you. But I know its no trifle for a fellow to have to set up house on his wits, which is what you seem to have brought yourself to, by your good management."

"Well what do you advise me to do?"

"Hold out as long as you can, and then pull down your flag."

"Would you take that advice yourself, if you were placed like me?"

“ I’d never be placed like you. I did not go on the plan of long submission and sudden rebellion. My father and I have not quarrelled, mind, and yet he would no more think of asking me to do what I did not like, than he would cut his hand off.”

“ Why should I obey more than you do? Every man owes a duty to his father, but not such a duty as that. And I would rather lose my right hand, than marry Helen.”

“ She has a right to be flattered. However, if you let her go by the board, she’ll marry Osborne—mind, I tell you.”

“ I don’t think that.”

“ You’ll see if she doesn’t, I know a thing or two more about women than you do, Archie.”

“ You don’t seem to know much good of them.”

“ I don’t know that there is much good to know of them, Douglas. But, by Jove, I forgot my smoke,” he said, searching for his cigar.

“Where is Osborne now, Frederick?”

“I don’t know. He was at Dover the time when I would not tell you where he was. But I have never seen him since.”

This was partly true. He had not seen him exactly. That is he had not spoken to him, but he fancied it was Harry’s face he had caught a glimpse of, that very night as he came up the Strand. He was in a cab, and his face only showed for a moment, as it turned the corner of a street, where a lamp shone on it.

“I suppose he is gone abroad. Perhaps he crossed over to France.”

“Perhaps so, it’s hard to say. How did your sister stand it?”

“Better than I expected. She was beginning to pull round a little; but I fear this business of mine will upset her again.”

Osborne puffed awhile at his cigar.

“You’ll take lodgings, I suppose. Of course you’ll not stay here.”

“ I’ll do nothing for a few days, at any rate.”

“ Just as you like,” Frederick said, thinking that if his friend chose to cripple his own funds, he might. It was none of his business to thrust advice on him; he had enough to do to mind his own affairs.

“ Shall I see you to-morrow ?” Archie asked, as Osborne rose to say good-night.

“ Of course. You’ll come down to my chambers at six o’clock—I’ll promise you a good dinner. That old she-dragon I have, is a capital cook when she is in good temper.”

“ That’s more than she was to-day,” Archie said, shaking hands with Osborne.

When Douglas found himself alone, instead of going to bed as a sensible man come off a journey would have done, he sat down to write to Grace Clifford. It was a long loving letter. A letter that Mr. Clifford would have gloried in had he seen it, as Archie committed himself ten times over, between the commencement

and the end. That end, how delicious it was to Grace.

“London is rich in photographers, Grace, darling. I wish I had you here to have your likeness taken, but as that cannot be, Cranston must serve instead. Do, like a good girl, send me up the best resemblance of yourself you can get. I so long to have a peep at your sweet face.”

“Well, Grace, here’s a letter from Archie,” Mr. Clifford said, as he put it in her hand. “All’s well, I suppose?”

“Oh yes, all’s well. But, papa, may I go to Cranston? Archie wants something.”

“Wants what, my girl?”

“A photograph.”

“A photograph of whom?—of me, is it?” he asked, laughing. “Of course you may go, Grace. I’ll go with you myself.” And Mr. Clifford congratulated himself, how well the correspondence had opened.

Archie’s letter written he went to bed, and soon fell into a sound sleep, notwithstanding

that he had taken some serious thoughts along with him, and he rose in the morning to a late breakfast, and a stroll through St. James's Park. He stood for an hour on the bridge, watching the ducks darting about through the water, and the swans slowly sailing hither and thither, and then came home to his hotel to dress, in order to pay a visit to Sir George Osborne. Conventionality made him say Sir George Osborne, even to himself ; but I am fairly bound to admit, that if Sir George had been alone at Prince's Gate, he would have had a poor chance of that visit.

When Douglas opened his trunk, to get some things out which he required, he came on a little tiny parcel carefully sealed. Across it, in his mother's hand, were the words : “For my darling son.” Some little token of remembrance, some kind proof of her love, Archie knew it must be ; but what was it ? He took it to the window and opened it. A small note, and a purse were found within. The purse contained a bank of England note for

ten pounds, and two others for five each, three sovereigns, and some shillings in silver : a joint contribution from Mrs. Douglas, and Marion—all that they had in fact, but he should have more when he needed it.

“ God bless you, mother,” Archie thought, as he proceeded with his dressing. “ The fortress is not starved out yet.”

Then he must needs be extravagant, and take a cab, whereas he had intended to walk before ; but now he reflected that dusty boots would not look well in Lady Osborne’s eyes. So he drove to Prince’s Gate, and seated himself by Lady Osborne’s lounging chair ; Sir George was dozing by the window, as if he had never stirred from it, since Douglas had seen him last.

Her ladyship was as handsome as ever, and as kind as ever. She was so glad to see him, so anxious about his sister, that she encouraged Archie, to talk to her of Marion. Then she took him into the conservatory, and they walked round through the flowers, while

Archie told her all about himself, and all about Grace.

“It is so refreshing to meet a touch of real romance now, in this matter-of-fact world,” her ladyship said, smiling upwards at her handsome companion, as she stood plucking the leaves of a plant, and strewing them on the ground; “but poor Miss Douglas! I am half sorry for Miss Douglas! I really am afraid, Mr. Douglas, that you are a little bit of a——” she paused and laughed—“shall I say it?”

“Surely, Lady Osborne,” Archie answered, not knowing whether he was charmed most with the music of her laugh, or the archness of her beautiful face.

“Well, then, the least bit of a flirt.”

“No, no, Lady Osborne; I deny the accusation.”

“Of course you do; and I claim the privilege of holding my opinion. You know you can’t convince a lady: wise men never argue with them.”

“Then I shall be a wise man, and hold my tongue.”

A servant appearing at the entrance of the conservatory prevented Lady Osborne replying.

“Lord Henry Craven is in the drawing-room, my lady.”

“Oh, indeed!” and her ladyship moved forward with an eagerness that seemed to say, she was glad to see Lord Henry. “He is a distant relative of mine, through my mother,” she whispered to Archie, at the drawing-room door.

His lordship was busily engaged examining a photographic album when they entered, and not making the least effort to talk to Sir George, who sat watching him out of his half-closed eyes. He laid down the book as soon as Lady Osborne came in, and advanced to meet her.

He was not a lord of the Dundreary type, counting his family on his fingers, but a sensible-looking, handsome man, with well cut

features, and luminous dark eyes, which lighted up with pleasure, as he met Lady Osborne's smiling face. Her manner of receiving him was kind ; I had nearly said cordial, except that there was always a softness about her—almost a tenderness—that prevented cordiality.

Archie felt that in this man's presence, her manner to himself altered, almost imperceptibly, but it did alter ; and what it lost to him, the other gained. Perhaps it was that distant relationship, or perhaps it was older acquaintanceship that caused it, Archie thought ; but whatever it was, he did not care to stay, shining as a lesser light, where another shone as a greater ; and he very shortly took his leave.

“ That is a handsome young fellow, that Mr.—what did you say his name was ? ”

“ Douglas,” her ladyship answered. “ Yes, he is handsome, but just a little bit too—too—soft ! ” and Lady Osborne laughed, with the same musical laugh, and looked up in his lordship's face, with the same attractive archness

as she had looked up at Archie in the conservatory.

“I met a Lord Henry Craven at your uncle’s to-day, Osborne,” Archie observed to that gentleman, as they sat smoking their cigars after dinner.

“That’s her ladyship’s present admirer and favourite: he usurped your place during your absence.”

“I had no place, Osborne.”

“Yes you had: you were the dancing bear in leading strings. But you are dismissed from the staff just now. Prince’s Gate will not be so pleasant a place as it was when her ladyship’s face shone on you. As to his lordship, his reign will probably last a month, or two months at the most, during which time he will hear every word of your romantic history. You were very foolish to go talking of your affairs to that woman.”

“Who told you that I did?”

“Nobody: but I know you did. As for sympathy, feeling, and all that, she has as

much as the man in the moon. There are two kinds of people who are believed to be the best creatures living, and they are not worth a feather's weight in the end. The feminine part of them are always ready with a kind word, that costs them nothing, and a kind ear that is apt to be a very curious one ; but it goes no deeper : you'll get neither money, nor help from them. The goodnatured souls amongst us generally go about full of professions, and wide mouthed, goodnatured talk, like your parson down at Stedleigh, or else he tells you what a good-for-nothing rascal he is—always in scrapes, either through himself, or his friends. Take that fellow at his word,—he says he is a good-for-nothing rascal, and you may believe him.”

“ Nonsense, Osborne. I don't mind half what you say, and I don't believe about Lady Osborne.”

“ Nonsense is a favourite word of yours,” Frederick answered. “ However, you'll live to see I am right. As regards that aunt of

mine, she is a most atrocious flirt, but she knows well what she is about. She can enjoy herself in her own way, and set the world at defiance. Who dare utter a word against her, as long as that old husband of hers, lends the light of his countenance to her proceedings? It's not a handsome countenance, but it's a very useful one to her ladyship."

Archie could not help laughing, as he lighted another cigar.

"I wonder is the world at large enjoying itself as well as we are?" he said, swaying himself in Osborne's rocking-chair.

The world was enjoying itself, or part of it, at least, in a way he little imagined.

In York Place Harry Osborne stood on the rug in the drawing-room, as he had stood before with Helen Douglas; but this time Helen's hand rested in his. He had written a letter to her from Dover, praying to be allowed to see her, and had not been denied admission when he called.

In the back drawing-room Lady Mackenzie,

and Angus Douglas sat whispering together, calculating the benefits of a match with Osborne, and the probable length of the two old lives, which stood between him and the baronetcy.

“If I were you, I’d get back to Stedleigh,” Frederick Osborne said to Archie, a week later, as they sat together again over their cigars. “All you have to do is to give up Miss Clifford. As to Miss Douglas’s share, it will adjust itself.”

“What do you mean, Osborne? Did you hear anything about Helen?”

“Where was I to hear anything? They are all in York Place yet, I know, the old fellow and all; for I saw him with them.”

“Even if my father gave up the point as to Helen, I could not consent to part from Grace.”

“A fool in his folly! How are you to get on with his face set against you? He’ll give you no money now, and he’ll leave his property away from you.”

“ His money he may, but his property is not in his power. Stedleigh is Marion’s, and The Grange is mine, in spite of the world.”

“ Is that the way of it? Gad! he is barking, then, with his teeth drawn, so that he can’t bite. Why, you can borrow money on it, and live here as long as you like.”

Archie got up and walked about the room. The devil was tempting him to borrow the money, marry Grace, and take her over to the Continent out of his father’s way. That would settle both the marriage questions at once, but then his father would never forgive him, and not even his mother would countenance him in such an act.

“ I’ll not do it,” he said, stopping right before Osborne.

“ Not do what?” the other asked, taking his cigar from his mouth.

“ I’ll not borrow that money, and marry Grace, as you and my evil spirit were tempting me to do.”

“ Me ! I never even thought of her.”

“ But you thought of the money.”

“ Listen to me now, Douglas : you must do one of two things—you must either give in to your father, or borrow money ; there’s but the two courses open to you. The first is the wisest and best. The first is what I advise you to mind, even if you do the other.”

“ I’ll do neither,” Archie answered, going round to the fire-place, and leaning his shoulder against the wall ; “ I’ll do neither.”

“ Very well.”

“ I’ll tell you what, Osborne, I’m getting tired of this work. Here I am, hanging about London, killing time, and spending money that might be more profitably employed otherwise. If my father wants me away from Stedleigh, he shall have me away in earnest. I have been thinking of it these two days.”

“ Where are you going to ?”

“ I have a mind to go to the gold diggings.”

“Don’t be a fool, Douglas; maybe you would get knocked on the head, they are a rough set there.”

“I’ll get rough like the rest of them. I’ll not burden The Grange with debt, and interest, if I can help it. I can’t make my bread by the law like you, nor write articles for magazines like Pounce; so I don’t see anything for it but the diggings, unless I take Her Majesty’s shilling. By Jove! if I wanted to gall my father, that’s what I’d do. He would be proud to see me with recruiting colours in my cap.”

“But what put the diggings in your head?”

“Grace’s brother is over there, making money too, and lodging it in the Melbourne bank.”

“Yes, I remember hearing that one of them ran off. Take my advice, Archie, don’t be in a hurry; wait a fortnight or three weeks, and something may turn up to cure your father of part of his folly.”

“ You speak as if you knew something was going to happen,” Archie said.

“ There’s always something happening, and who knows what may turn the tables in your favour? People don’t get anything by dashing off without having a little patience. Oh, Acton, how do you do?” and the conversation was interrupted by the entrance of a tall, thin gentleman, with a sharp eye, and a sharp face, the same gentleman to whom Archie had lost the fifty pounds at billiards.

“ You were at court all day, I suppose?” Acton said, drawing a chair, and taking a cigar Osborne offered.

“ Yes ; and on my return my friend Douglas dropped in for a chat. You are come for the game I promised you?”

“ I’ll try one with Mr. Douglas first, if he’ll play,” Acton said, turning to Archie.

Archie shook his head.

“ I have no money about me to-night, Mr. Acton.”

Acton smiled.

“ You ought to try and win back your money,” he said.

“ There’s no chance of that, I’m too bad a player.”

“ Come along, then, we two, and Douglas can look on,” Osborne cried, snatching up a cue.

Douglas did look on, while the players played with varied success, Osborne losing on the whole, but not much.

“ I’ll not touch a cue to risk a shilling, or burthen the Grange with debt, if I can help it,” Archie said to himself. “ I’d rather work like a galley-slave, than drag Grace in to share my ruin.”

And this was how he loved her.

CHAPTER VII.

NOT AT HOME—ADMIRAL OSBORNE AS A
PEACE-MAKER.

To a man of Mr. Douglas's temper, the refusal of his son to marry where he wished him to marry, was an act of positive rebellion. Hitherto he had carried the Stedleigh reins in his own hands; wife, daughter, and son were riveted into their places, and he had never supposed that even Archie would venture seriously to dispute his wishes. If they were stretched beyond reasonable limits there might be some contention, perhaps, but no real, positive opposition.

Mr. Douglas had known all along, that Archie had a will of his own. He had even thought it probable that he would in a degree endeavour to carry out that will ; but although he had not expected to find him feeble, and pliant, neither did he expect to find him so rashly daring, as to dream of carrying things with the high hand, he carried them with now.

Archie must not be suffered to have his way ; this rebellion must be put down, cut off at the root, before it got too strong, or he should have every one up in arms presently. Matters were tending in that direction already. Mrs. Douglas was shewing an inclination to do battle for her son ; she had spoken to her husband, and tried to reason with him, begging to be allowed to mediate between him and Archie. Even Marion ventured on a word or two, but Mr. Douglas shewed them he would bear no such interference. He put the thing aside at once, and set his foot upon it. Let Archie come forward himself,

and say he would do as he wished him to do, as he owed it to Helen to do ; let him give up Grace Clifford, and marry his cousin, then and then only would he have his father's face turned towards him again, and until then he must remain an exile from Stedleigh. He would not have him talked of, and upheld, in his contumacy ; he would not have him written to and encouraged to rebel. A letter from Archie to his mother coming in the Stedleigh letter-bag, was sent back to London by his father, with an intimation that as he divided himself from his family, he must remain divided, until he chose to repent his present course, and take that which he ought to follow.

How far this was likely to further his end with Archie, was the question. It was not the best way, certainly ; any one with a trifling knowledge of man's nature, might have told Mr. Douglas that ; but even if they had, he would have pursued his own plan in spite of them. He had not himself much knowledge of human nature, and he had but one way of

dealing with it. His notion was to get it down, and keep it down.

He had been able to do this with both his wives, and his daughter, it was another thing when he came to deal with his son. Archie's nature was not only a man's nature, and as such entitled to mastery, but it was a nature with a thread of his own running through it, which disposed him to set coercion at defiance, and follow out his own plans in opposition to his father's, and opposition was a thing Mr. Douglas could neither understand nor submit to.

He decided that Archie must be conquered, must be starved into compliance; he was ready to go any lengths in order to carry out that darling scheme of his, regarding Inchcauld-die and Helen Douglas. His promise to the dead, and his own covetous desire, were beating through the old man's brain, from day to day.

He had wrung a promise from Angus Douglas before he left Stedleigh, that he

would remain in London for the week, he had at first refused to concede. During that week he must work in some way, to get rid of Grace. If he could prevail on her, and her father, through pride or fear, to give up Archie, that would be a great obstacle removed.

With a view to this, he called at the Rectory. Mr. Clifford was not at home, and would not return until late on Saturday night, Miss Clifford was not at home either. There was nothing for it but to wait. Mr. Clifford had gone out of his way, Mr. Douglas felt sure of that, and Grace had been removed too, lest he should interfere with her in her father's absence. Mr. Clifford was a clever man, a very clever man, good tempered, and prone to have his way; but having it in a different mode from Mr. Douglas, and as Mr. Douglas walked back to Stedleigh, he half confessed to himself, that he took tough work in hand, when he thought of managing the parson.

When he returned to Stedleigh the door

was opened by Traynor. Traynor the curious, who had made himself pretty well acquainted with the cause of quarrel, between Mr. Douglas and Archie.

“The Admiral is in the library sir,” he said, as his master stepped into the hall. “He has been waiting to see you for half an hour.”

Mr. Douglas wished the Admiral at Jericho but he must see him. He went into the library, carrying his hat and stick with him.

“They have given you a lift here in the Cranston Standard, I see Douglas,” the Admiral said, as he shook hands, and laid down the paper he had been reading. “They take good hold of Hamilton’s absenteeism.”

“Yes, it’s not bad ground that. Reddington makes the most of it with the voters,” Mr. Douglas answered, drawing forward a chair.

“Are you making headway?”

“Oh yes, I have got some promises.” He did not care to be special with his old friend,

he knew he was a man who would babble it all over to any one who asked him.

The Admiral was silent a minute, and then taking out his snuff-box, offered Mr. Douglas the inevitable pinch.

“ You’ll not be offended, Douglas, if I ask you a question or two about Archie ? ” he said, he wanted to speak about Archie, and he saw no better way of bringing the subject up.

“ You are one of the few from whom I would bear questioning, Admiral,” Mr. Douglas answered, slowly. It was as much as to say “ You have a limited privilege, don’t abuse it.”

“ I want to know one thing. How long do you intend this quarrel to last ? ”

“ He knows that best, it is in his hands, not mine.”

“ It is not in his hands, but yours. Do you say the word, and he’ll come home fast enough. It’s hard to expect him to marry a girl he does not like, you know Douglas, devilish hard, especially—”

The Admiral stopped.

“In other words, I am to give in, and he is to carry his way ; on those conditions he'll come back. The times are changed Admiral, it seems to me now-a-days, as if the fathers obeyed, and the sons ruled.”

The Admiral felt he had made a blunder, and that his friend had taken advantage of it.

“I do not mean, of course, that you are to ask him to return.”

“What do you mean then ?”

“Just this, that it's a bad business, and that there ought to be concessions on both sides, as there have been faults on both sides. You were wrong about Miss Douglas, and he was foolish perhaps, about Grace.”

“There is no perhaps in it at all, Admiral ; he has been wrong with regard to both of them, Helen more particularly. He deceived her, and he deceived me, into the notion he was going to marry her. Everybody thought it in fact, I'll be bound to say you thought it yourself.”

The Admiral was forced to admit that he did think it.

"He had no business to play such a game then, and he shall not play it; we have had enough of that work here already."

The Admiral reddened.

"You mean Harry; that has been a sore blow to me, Douglas, a very sore blow. He acted like a blackguard, I must admit that. Like a blackguard, although he is my own son."

Mr. Douglas made no answer, he had said enough to shew the Admiral that the discipline of his own house was not perfect, and that he had better not interfere with his.

"Then you mean to hold out against Archie," the Admiral said, after a minute.

"I mean to do what's just, and I would rather not discuss the subject. Was it Margaret that asked you to meddle in the matter?"

"I did it for old friendship's sake, and because I like Archie himself. He is a

spirited fellow, and such work as this often drives men like him to the dogs."

"He did not shew his spirit much in his choice of a wife. That Clifford girl is no match for him. She is a penniless schemer."

"I differ with you there, Douglas," the old man said, standing up bravely for his favourite. "She is a good girl, fit to be any man's wife, and a lady every inch of her. The Clifffords come of an old stock, and as to her mother's side of the house, she is a lady that way too."

"I don't care, she is no match for my son, and I'll never give my consent, never. He'll have to come down off his high horse. He can't live in London upon nothing."

"He'll not live on nothing," the Admiral said, shaking his head. "There are ways of getting money when people have anything to look to, Archie is no fool."

"But he has nothing to look to, not a penny as long as I live."

“Aye, but the Grange is settled on him you know. Suppose he tried a post obit.”

Mr. Douglas got up off his chair, and stood upon the rug, in the very same spot, where he had stood while he contended with Archie. He was angry at the possibility the Admiral suggested. He was angry, because it made him feel his hold on Archie loose; he had calculated so much on the power he had in his hands, when he could watch for his son's submission with drawn purse strings. Now it was suddenly presented to him that Archie could get money in spite of him, could overwhelm the Grange with debts at his pleasure, could live in present defiance of him, at the cost of future ruin.

“As you are so much his friend, you had better tell him where to find the powder and ball, with which to fight me,” he said.

“Come, come, now Douglas. I only meant to give you a friendly warning. I am your friend, and his friend, so much the friend of

both, that I would gladly see the breach healed between you."

"Let it be. You must excuse my discussing it any more. I shall do as I please in regard to Archie. You did not manage your own son so well, that I can trust you with mine."

"Well, well, we'll see how you will manage your's. However as we did not quarrel over Marion, don't let us quarrel over Archie."

"I dont want to quarrel. I only want the privilege of doing as I please in my own family. But let us have done with it, and tell me, have you heard any fresh news about your son?"

"Yes, I had a letter to-day. He was run aground for money at Dover, but as soon as he got it, he came up to London, and he wrote to me from thence."

"You sent it to him then."

"What could I do? I could not have him without a shilling in his pocket, and he would have got it whether I liked it or not. There

is not a Jew in London, that would not lend money to my heir."

"It was the same thing to you whether they would or not."

"Aye, aye, Douglas. He is an unfortunate rascal, an unfortunate rascal. Ring that bell there's a good fellow, I sent my brougham round to the yard."

"Won't you like to see Margaret, and Marion?"

"I saw them both already. I must be off now; Charlotte bade me not stay."

He did not add that he had carried letters from Archie over in his pocket, or that Charlotte Osborne was the receiver of those forbidden epistles.

Such men as Mr. Douglas make women plot and evade.

The Admiral's brougham, came duly round, and the old man drove back to The Cliff, thinking of the unsuccessful campaign he had made for Archie, of the young man still in exile from his home, and of that poor, weak,

foolish son of his, to whom he had been so hard in word, and so soft in deed.

It was dull work living at The Cliff without him. Harry had come to London for a day, he said, and was going down to Plymouth to buy a yatch, in order to take that long threatened cruise up the Mediterranean ; what better could he and Charlotte do than join him ? It was all nonsense trying to hold out against him, he was too weak and old to keep up anger, and he could not live without his son.

In the meantime Mr. Douglas still stood upon the rug in the library, where Admiral Osborne left him. He was thinking of Harry Osborne and Helen ; he did not like to hear he was in London, what was he doing there ? would he be likely to see Helen ? Then the words Angus Douglas had dropped about Harry, came back to him, "She might have better than either of them, as you know, Archibald."

Those words shewed Mr. Douglas that the

possibility of the marriage had crossed the old man's brain. Suppose they acted on that possibility, where would Inchcauldie be then, He felt very angry with Archie at that moment.

If Helen married Osborne. If he lost Inchcauldie through Archie's stubborn disobedience, he almost said to himself that he would never see him again, almost but not quite, for through the hard chords which wrapped his nature round and round, there ran a strong fibre of love for his only son. He might hide it away where no eye could see it, he might hide it away in a degree even from himself, but still it was there, making stronger battle for Archie than either his mother, or the Admiral could make.

There he stood looking at the library door, through which Archie had gone the day they parted. Then out on the lawn where Angus Douglas wandered in the sunshine, when Archie walked away from Stedleigh. He had missed his son's pleasant voice and

quick springing step, many a time since then. But he was not going to say so much even to himself now.

This much only he would say, he would forgive Archie the past, blot out his hot words, and his disobedience, provided he gave up Grace Clifford, and married Helen. When Archie was ready to fulfil his wishes, then and not till then, should the door of reconciliation be opened between them.

He was not going to yield one iota of that demand, he would not be threatened, disobeyed, and conquered, by his own son, but he would be just. It was but justice that Archie should marry Helen. She had been led to expect it. Her father had been led to expect it, and it must be done. Yes, he repeated again. It is just. Mr. Douglas was never more hard in his life, never more inflexible, than when he declared to himself, or others, that he would be just.

CHAPTER VIII.

A DAY OUT CANVASSING. MR. DOUGLAS
AND THE RECTOR.

WHEN Mr. Reddington reached Stedleigh, an hour after Admiral Osborne's departure, he found Mr. Douglas still standing on the hearth-rug—still looking out through the open window on the lawn. The little man came in with his brisk, ready tongue, in contrast to Mr. Douglas's comparative impasiveness.

He was full of news of what this one, or that, had said or done. Spratt, the little Stedleigh attorney, had told him a thing, or

two. He had acted on Spratt's hint, and snatched a vote, before Hamilton had time to look for it. The fellow was uncertain—did not exactly know what he would do—and Mr. Reddington helped him to make up his mind. A vote was something in these times, when there was likely to be a close run.

"Come along, Douglas," he said. "Get your horse round, and we'll have a ride, and see what we can do."

Mr. Reddington had never called him "Douglas" until recently, and Mr. Douglas's proud, distant nature shrunk from the familiarity. The two men were of a different stamp—a different standing in life--although the family at the Grove, and the family at Stedleigh visited.

However, these were electioneering times. Mr. Reddington was useful, and he knew it. Where would Mr. Douglas's chance be, without Mr. Reddington.

That day's ride brought Mr. Douglas some

votes, but, 'on the whole, not much satisfaction. He visited farmers' houses, and talked to farmers' wives, in a way he was not accustomed to, or, rather, he let Mr. Reddington talk for him. He strove to smile, and say a civil word or two, while his friend did the heavy work. But smiles, and civility, did not sit well on him. They had a smack of condescension about them, that made them look as if they were only put on for the occasion, and would by no means be worn when the election was over.

It was no light task, for such a man as Mr. Douglas, to go through the necessary amount of hand-shaking, so often requisite for a man to endure, before he gets shoved into Parliament. Then, besides the hand-shaking, there were questions to be answered. Every constituent had a right to know, what his member would be disposed to support, in the great house. Would he stand up for this thing, or would he stand up for that?

These independent voters, must have the

value of their votes out in conversation and information, and the defendant candidate had nothing for it but to submit. But the worst of the submission was, that sometimes, after all the trouble had been gone through, the voter split a hair about something, and kept his vote for Hamilton.

Then, besides all this, there were concessions. His own tenantry would vote for him, of course; but there were men, and women, too, even amongst his own tenantry who would not vote for him, if they took a different idea into their heads.

These stiff-necked people, the women of the family, more especially—and everyone knows they lead the household opinions, had always something to demand. Bribery was out of the question, at which we have seen Angus Douglas's intense disgust, but there are other kinds of bribes, that people will have in spite of the law, and of which no watchful opposition agent can take cognizance. These bribes, in the shape of the concessions

I have already alluded to, were extorted by those wise household goddesses, who knew well that this was the time to put the screw on their landlord, and they had it pretty much their own way.

Faugh ! It was all muddy water, and filthy slough for Mr. Douglas, to be wading through the slime of questions, and demands which these people thrust upon him—afraid either to quench familiarity, or kill a joke, by his usual distant reserve. It was electioneering time ; the barriers were down, and he dare not raise them, least Hamilton should triumph. But he was weary of it all—sick of it all, when the day was over. And he rode home to Stedleigh, having managed poorly enough, Mr. Reddington thought, and lost two doubtful votes, that he might have had, if he had been ready to promise and declare as Hamilton's friends would promise and declare, most probably. What was said, might not be all true, perhaps, but what great harm was there in that ? Who told truth in election days ?

Mr. Douglas, to do him justice, could not play shuttlecock with his conscience, even for a vote. If he were a hard man, he was at least an honourable one. Although not always soft or kind in his strain after honour and justice, he was at least too fair to act a lie, or to tell one. But the day was over, the two votes were gone for ever, and Mr. Reddington was not satisfied.

If Archie Douglas had been there, they would have done better. Archie was the fellow to talk the men over, to cajole and coax them, and, above all, to manage the women. That was the great point, where Archie's canvassing strength lay, in Mr. Reddington's eyes.

“Only manage the women, and you carry the votes,” he had said to Mr. Douglas, before the canvassing began—but Mr. Douglas could manage neither men nor women. Whatever votes he got, were from the force of other influence, and Mr. Reddington was not slow to think, that he would lose many which Archie would have secured. It was the mischief his

choosing to quarrel with him at such a time, he thought, and, as they got near to Stedleigh village, he broke out with—

“I tell you what, Douglas. You made a mess of it when you lost your son’s interest in the canvassing. He would carry all before him with the farmer’s wives. What the deuce do half those buxom women, we saw to-day, care for two such greybeards as you and me?”

Mr. Douglas was not in good-humour. He was disgusted with his day’s work—disgusted with Mr. Reddington’s free manner of naming him, and calling him a greybeard. Verily, that election was bringing bitter fruit. But, above all, he was angry that Archie’s name should be brought in question. He had borne it from Admiral Osborne, but he was not going to bear it, from Mr. Reddington.

“I tell you what it is,” he said, reining up his horse, and making a dead stop on the road. “Discuss what subject you like, but

don't let my son's name, be mentioned between us."

"Very well. Be it so. I didn't know you were so angry with him."

And the two men rode on—Mr. Reddington, in his obtuseness, not seeing that his companion was more angry with him, than with Archie, and that the sentence, in Mr. Douglas's mind, ran, "Don't you take the liberty, of interfering in my private concerns."

It was half-past six o'clock when they entered the village. Some farmers, and one or two townspeople were lounging round the door of a public-house. In the middle of the knot of men stood up, tall and straight, the large figure of Tom Williams.

The time had come now, for Tom to pay off the score he notched against Mr. Douglas, the day he left the Hill Farm. The time had come, and Tom was using it well.

Possessed of an open eye, a face pleasant to look at, and a ready tongue, Williams was just the man to lead the opinions of

people of his own class. There was a good-humoured thick-headedness, about the men assembled round him. Once get an idea planted in their brain, and they would be apt to stick to it. No one knew this better than Tom, and he busied himself that night, and for many nights before, and after, planting ideas, that were not likely to bear pleasant blossoms, for his old landlord.

Tom had not been in the habit, hitherto, of frequenting the tap-room of the Green Dragon ; but, since the election stir began, he was sure to be seen either there, or standing at the door, talking to a knot of men, as he was talking, when Mr. Douglas and Mr. Reddington came in sight.

“ That rascal is up to harm, mind, I tell you, Douglas,” Mr. Reddington said, as his eye fell on Tom. “ You have not a bitterer enemy about here, than Williams.”

“ I dare say. I turned him off my land, for poaching my hares.”

“ Gad, and he is poaching your votes.”

"A fellow like that can't have much influence."

"I disagree with you. There's no man can influence the opinion of the lower classes, so well as an orator from amongst themselves. We see it every day. We can't influence them, and they can't influence us. But we can influence one another, and so can they. Class sticks to class. Why are our working population, pushing up nowadays? Not because they adhere to the gentry, or depend on the gentry, but because they adhere to themselves. I tell you that man is dangerous to us, and he'll vote against us."

"He has no vote. His mother owns the land."

"There you are wrong again—he has two. He took Cawton's farm himself, and his brother between them. They have the land divided, and separate leases—each of them holds a vote. He's a deep hand, that, I can tell you."

Mr. Douglas mused.

“It was long before this he took the land, though.”

“Of course.’ But Brownlowe was ill at the time. How far do you think he may have seen before him?’

This was gall and wormwood to Mr. Douglas. He liked to strike, but he did not like to be hit back again. He made no answer, but giving a lowering look at Williams, put spurs to his horse, and went at a quick trot home to Stedleigh, where he found a note from Mr. Wilson, one of his guests the night of the dinner party, telling him he would call for him at ten o'clock next morning, as he wanted to go round his tenants with him, to bespeak their votes. It was only a mere form, he said, as he had done wonders for him already.

Mr. Douglas put the note in Mr. Reddington's hands, as they went upstairs, to prepare for dinner. He put it into his hands, but he said nothing. This was more of the slough of that vote-hunting. He, the master of

Stedleigh Manor, was patronised by a man like Wilson. He had done wonders for him, with his paltry property, and his nine or ten tenants.

However, the next day passed. Mr. Douglas survived Mr. Wilson's patronizing, and accepted the votes. Then Saturday came, bringing Mr. Clifford back to the Rectory, and on Sunday Mr. Douglas paid him a visit.

"This is not a day for calling, I know," he said, by way of apology, to the clergyman, for breaking the sabbath; "but I am so busy now, I really have no other."

"I am glad to see you any day," Mr. Clifford answered, knowing well war was coming, but determined not to see it, until he could not help it. Then he rang the bell and ordered in some wine; but Mr. Douglas declined to have any. He had been in the habit of taking a glass of wine when he came to the Rectory. His not taking it now, was another sign of impending war. "Never

mind," Mr. Clifford thought, "I am on the safe side of the hedge."

"You are busy with the election, I suppose? Hamilton's people are busy, too. There were a couple of Cranston fellows betting on your relative claims, in the train with me last night."

Mr. Douglas closed his teeth, and looked hard at the decanter. It was daring of those Cranston men, to bet on him, as they would on a racehorse.

"I did not come to talk of the election, Mr. Clifford. I called here through the week, and you were from home. There is a matter I want to speak to you about particularly."

"Anything you like. I have time at my disposal between the services. I am sorry I was away when you called; but I just ran into Yorkshire, to see George. He is very snug there, I can tell you. I have left Grace with him, for a week or so."

"Indeed! Well it is chiefly about Grace I want to speak to you. I have been very

much astonished to find that she has engaged herself to marry my son. This, I presume, was without your knowledge ?”

Mr. Clifford drew up his eyebrows, and then he smiled.

“ It was without my knowledge, at first ; but Archie told me the day he left Stedleigh. I have no objection, of course, to the match.”

It was cool impudence, certainly ; as if he supposed for a moment that Mr. Douglas was come to negotiate the marriage, and wanted his opinion as the lady’s father.

“ I dare say not, Mr. Clifford ; but I have an objection—a very strong one.”

“ I am sorry to hear it—very sorry to hear it ; I don’t like to hold an opposite opinion from my friends,” Mr. Clifford answered quite unembarrassed. Taking up a biscuit he began eating it with an air of indifference.

“ Of course you understand, Mr. Clifford, I mean to oppose this marriage—mean to refuse my consent.”

“That won’t free your son from his promise.”

“I have nothing to do with his promise. If your daughter will not break the engagement, he must.”

“That is a highly, honourable alternative,” Mr. Clifford said, half smiling, and still munching his biscuit. “You did not like it when applied to your own daughter; but you have no objection to trying it on mine.”

“The circumstances were different,” Mr. Douglas said, reddening in spite of himself.

“In your eyes, perhaps, but not in mine. There can be no reasonable objection to Grace marrying Archie. If you have any you consider such, you had best say what they are.”

“In the first place, his marriage with another lady was partly arranged, and in the next, Miss Clifford is no match for him. She is not at all the person that I should have chosen for my son.”

“But your son chose her for himself; and,

remember, Mr. Douglas, that in all things, except money, my daughter is his equal."

This was true. Mr. Douglas wished it was not. He would have found pleasure in contradicting it.

"That exception is one of my objections. My son's wife should have money and position. You must excuse my saying so, Mr. Clifford, but your daughter not only has no means, but no standing in the county. The daughter of the Rector of Stedleigh is a lady, no doubt, but she is no match for a son of mine."

Mr. Clifford laughed. There was a touch of irony in his laugh.

"That is not a bad idea, Mr. Douglas," he said, rising from his chair and standing on the rug, with a hand in each pocket, looking at his visitor, the laugh still playing round his mouth. "You don't approve of marrying clergymen's daughters, don't you? Well, I am glad to have your opinion, seeing it is valuable, with the weight of experience."

Mr. Clifford was a picture as he stood there,

chuckling over his biting gibe, his whole face glowing with satirical mirth.

A man is never so strong, as when he has the weapons of war in his hands, and can face his enemy from the centre of his own hearth.

Mr. Douglas might stand in the drawing-room at Stedleigh, and dictate his will, with the brevity, and force of an oracle. But it was a hard thing to sit in the drawing-room at the Rectory, and argue down the resolve of a man like Mr. Clifford.

Mr. Clifford, who stood there looking at him from the middle of the rug, and crowing defiantly, not with rude or angry words, but mocking jovial defiance, that was very hard to bear.

“Mr. Clifford, you have not acted as you ought, in this matter,” Mr. Douglas said, trying to bury the shaft, about the clergyman’s daughter. “You should not have suffered this engagement to take place, without my knowledge.”

“ It took place without my own. But as it has taken place, it must stand. You see, my dear sir, Grace can feel things as well as any one else, and she might chance to suffer as keenly, as other people suffered, by a broken promise, who had not the ill luck to have a parson for a father.”

“ I am sorry that any one should suffer. But I have warned you this marriage shall not take place.”

“ But that with his cousin shall, I suppose. Well, you must get Mr. Crawford over for it; you can hardly ask me to perform the ceremony.”

“ Am I to understand you don’t mean to give up the hold you have got on my son?”

“ I have got no hold on him. It’s Grace who has the hold, and to tell you the truth, I don’t think either of them will give up.”

“ Then recollect, I refuse my consent, emphatically. I’ll never allow that marriage,” Mr. Douglas said, rising and laying his hand heavily on the table.

“ Let me speak seriously, Mr. Douglas,”

Mr. Clifford said, dropping his ironical banter. “ Let me tell you, that you have no right to coerce your son’s affections—no right to make him perjure himself, in the face of God, by marrying his cousin. Nor have you any right either to thwart my daughter’s happiness, or to expect me to aid you.”

“ That may be fireside doctrine, but it’s not Bible doctrine—the doctrine you profess to teach—that doctrine which says, ‘ Children obey your parents.’ ”

“ Read on another verse, only go one verse lower, and you will find, ‘ Fathers provoke not your children to wrath,’ and then as you go home, ask yourself, have you not provoked your’s.”

“ I did not come to render an account to you. I came to ask you to do an act of justice. To help me to save my son, from the consequence of his folly.”

“ I cannot save him, as you call it. He is beyond my saving, now. He has made a promise, and he must keep it.”

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“ Then, good morning, Mr. Clifford,” Mr. Douglas said stiffly, without offering his hand.

“ Good morning, Mr. Douglas,” Mr. Clifford answered, keeping his still in his pocket ; and the two men parted, never to speak again.

“ It was not a bad dodge that,” Mr. Clifford thought, as he watched the old man down the avenue. “ Grace is well out of the way of his badgering. No money, that’s the great fault, is it ? I’ll take care she shall have no money, if I can manage to get Miss Harland, to transfer what she means for her into another channel. Jane and Annie must be looked to now.” And Mr. Clifford leaning against the drawing-room window, had leisure to scan the future prospects of his family, between those services he spoke of.

CHAPTER IX.

A STOLEN MEETING.

IT was a fine soft evening in July, the night before the great Cranston election, when Archie Douglas stepped from the Cranston terminus into the street of the town. The noise and trampling of feet, and the hum of many voices, told him that the town was alive with people idling about—drinking, talking, cheering, lounging, and even quarrelling, where a subject of dispute arose, about the matter they had in hand.

In separate inns, on either side of the principal street of the town, the rival candidates had located themselves, with their com-

mittee, their flags, voters, and supporters of all kinds. Archie could see the Douglas colours, floating from the balcony of his father's hotel;—those crimson and white colours, that he had laughingly promised Grace a rosette of, and which he dare only glance at from a distance, lest a nearer approach would betray his presence.

Men might press through the crowd, and go up and stand on that very balcony by his father's side, while he, the son of that father, was slinking away across the fields to Stedleigh, as the best chance of exciting little observation. He was tired of the negative fighting, that had been going on since he left home. Let him only have an out-and-out battle, and have an end of it. He could understand the wordy war he had had with his father when they parted in the library. Then something decisive had been said, and something decisive had been done, when he slammed the door behind him, and bid goodbye to the home fireside. But this war of

silence, this war of separation, the dense veil dropped between, him and all the old ties of that old home, was more than he could endure.

He found it impossible to live on in this kind of way. He would do something that would electrify his father, and all Stedleigh together — something that would end this dreary life, and give him change and freedom. Such freedom, as Tom Clifford enjoyed at Ballarat. Then there would be work for him to do, which would keep his mind from corroding with utter idleness. He could swim against the tide, or buffet the waves with a strong arm, but he would not flounder any longer in stagnant water ; and, with his brain full of this new plan, and the two last sovereigns left of his mother's gift in his pocket, he had come down to Stedleigh, to see the loved faces, and hear the loved voices, for the last time, perhaps, for many a day.

“ Stedleigh has had enough to say about us of late,” Archie thought, as he went along.

“That rascal Osborne began it, and it has been well followed up since. What, between the scandal of this open quarrel with my father, and the fuss of the election, the Stedleigh maw must be full.” And then he came to a field, across which trespass barriers had been put up, and a trespass notice, plastered on a board, staring him in the face. “Small chance of Douglas of Stedleigh being meddled with by ever so cross a farmer,” he thought, as he stooped under the barriers, and went along the hedge path over the meadow.

The Stedleigh property ran along below. Watkins’s farm was close at hand, and Archie thought if he could reach Watkins’s, he might send a message to the Manor, to tell he was in the neighbourhood, and fix a place of meeting with his mother. As he was turning this round in his mind, a gradual rising in the field, brought him in view of a farmhouse, large, white, and square, facing the road, backed by a comfortable farmyard, and some well-stocked fields.

“By Jove! that’s Cawton’s old house. It’s Williams’s land I’m on!” Archie cried to himself, recognising the place at a glance.

It was Williams’s land, and Williams was coming in through a gate, leading from one of the corn-fields into the meadow.

“Well, Tom, I dared your notice,” Archie said, as they met. “You’ll not catch me to serve a summons on to-morrow.”

“There be little fear of a summons to you, sir,” Tom said, touching his cap, and looking rather surprised at the meeting. “You be going to the Manor, sir, I suppose?”

“Yes, Williams, but not just yet. I am not very high in favour with all the Manor people, at present.”

“I heard of that, sir. But it’ll be all right by-and-by. The old gentleman’s temper can’t hold out for ever.”

“I daresay it cannot. Mine cannot, I know. I am getting pretty sick of this work already. I want a message taken to my mother—can you manage it for me?”

“To be sure, sir,” Tom answered, readily. “I meet Ellen down by the wood of an evening, in spite of the trespass. I’m to see her to-night, and she’ll take it up to the house.”

“That will just do, Williams, but you must wait for an answer. My father is not about the place, is he?”

“No, sir. He’s mostly hunting votes, or up in Cranston. He’s up there now I know.”

“I’ll engage he did not come to you to look for a vote.”

Williams looked away over the fields, and smiled.

“He did not come under the trespass barriers like you, sir,” he said.

They walked round the field, and then stood resting against the gate by which Tom had entered.

“Be they expecting you at the Manor, sir?” Williams asked, leaning his arm on the iron framework.

“Not exactly, to-day. I took it into my head last night to come down, when it was too late to write. I got out at Cranston, and walked here, intending to go to Watkins’s, when I met you.”

“There be a great stir in Cranston these times, sir—a great stir. To-morrow be the polling day you know, sir.”

“How do you think it will go?”

“Well, it’s hard to say. Both be strong, I believe; but I vote for Mr. Hamilton, and so does John. We have two farms, sir, and two votes.”

“Yes, of course you do. It will be no matter to me soon, how things go at Stedleigh.”

Archie stood against the gate-post a moment, looking across Williams’s fields to the boundary of the Stedleigh estate, and Stedleigh wood, dense and dark in the distance. Then he took out a pencil, and scribbled two hasty notes. One was to his mother.

“My darling mother,” he said, “I have

come down to have a look at you. I'll be up at the boat-house by the lake at ten o'clock, where I'll expect you and Marion. I must see Grace before then. Ever your's, Archie."

Not a word about that Ballarat scheme, he would wait until he saw her. Perhaps he dare not tell her even then.

The second note was to Grace Clifford, who had returned from Yorkshire, and he begged her to come over the fields to Williams's meadow. He must see her there, as he could not go to the Rectory.

" You'll take this to Miss Clifford, and give it into her own hands at once," he said, as he gave Williams the notes, " and this to my mother. I don't want any tattle about my being here, so you had best not tell any one but Ellen."

" Very well, sir," Tom answered, walking away on his errand, with as much zeal for the son, as if he were going to vote for the father to-morrow. And Archie, throwing himself at his length on the grass, lay alternately

watching the curling smoke, rising from Mrs. Williams's chimney, and the field path by which Grace would come from the Rectory, until Grace herself appeared, tripping over the grass in her pretty summer muslin, and the most becoming of hats and muffles.

How his father would frown in wrath if he saw Archie now, standing by the barriers, with his arm round Grace, and his lips pressed to hers.

“ You are the best of girls, Grace, and Williams the best of messengers,” he said.

“ Papa is away at Cranston, amusing himself with the election ; and I felt quite queer and odd, somehow, stealing over here to meet you. It seemed almost wrong.”

“ What nonsense ! Are we not man and wife, or nearly man and wife, and that’s the same thing. You are a foolish goose, Grace !”

He had called her a goose the evening he told her he loved her, at Miss Harland’s, and the word came pleasantly to her ear now.

“ It is you who are a goose,” she said—

“Such a goose that I am looking for the feathers.”

“Yes, and you would think them the handsomest feathers that ever goose wore.”

What nonsense it was they were talking. Nonsense to us, perhaps, looking from behind our forgotten folly, but better than the best of wisdom to them.

“Are we not like two country lovers, sitting out in the fields, Archie?” Grace said, as she sat by him on the grass, with her hand in his. “I wish we could sit here always.”

“Yes, if it could be always summer, and we always young,” he said, marring her picture by his grave look forward.

“Archie, dear, shall we not—

‘—— both grow old together?’

Do you remember Miss Douglas singing that song one night?”

“Yes, I do. I wish I had never seen her or her songs. I daresay I’m in the back of her books.”

“Have you not seen her since you went to London?”

“Not I. How could I go there after saying I would not marry her. I caught a glimpse of her once, coming out of the National Gallery with Lady Mackenzie, a day or two after I went back to London; and Frederick Osborne tells me they are in York Place yet, the old man and all.”

This much Osborne had told him, but not the rest that he knew. He did not think it necessary to add, that Harry Osborne was there too, not in the same house, but in lodgings a few doors lower down the street.

“Are you very lonely in London, Archie? I am very lonely at the Rectory without you, and without Marion. We sometimes give little nods at each other coming out of church behind your father’s back, and we had a long talk in the village the other day.”

Archie smiled at the account of Marion’s evasion of her grim custodian, smiled and caught Grace in his arms, kissing her and

telling her that this weary loneliness, and separation, would soon come to an end, but never breathing a word of the Ballarat plan. He could not bring himself to tell her that, although he thought of it more than once.

He must be up and doing, if he meant to win a home for her, and make her his wife, but there was no use in opening the question, until he had seen what money his mother could get for him. He could not go to Ballarat on a couple of sovereigns, so the two sat together until the evening shadows began to fall, and Tom Williams came back with a note from Mrs. Douglas. Then Archie, shaking hands with Tom, went with Grace across the fields, walking slowly, and lingering by the last stile, over the farewell words.

“I wish I were taking you back to London with me,” he said, pushing the hair off her cheek with his hand, and then stooping to kiss her, “I wish you were actually my wife, Grace.”

And he thought how he should like to marry Grace before he went to Ballarat.

“Then I should see all your London haunts, and London friends with Mr. Osborne, whom I used to know, and Lady Osborne too. Do you see much of Lady Osborne now?”

“Not so much as I did. There is some change—I don’t know what it is, but there is a change.” And Archie thought of Lord Henry Craven; whose shadow was always over Prince’s Gate.

He had usurped Douglas’s place, as some one will usurp his by-and-bye, when her ladyship tires of his admiration. She was safe however through it all; there was no life in her hollow-hearted vanity.

“Then I need not be jealous of Lady Osborne any more, Archie?”

“No, darling, nor need I fear a change in you. You will never change, Grace; never, my own Grace, nor shall I.”

“Not if your father tries our patience until my hair turns white. Will you promise not

to change then, Archie?" Grace asked, smiling into his face.

"We will find the Gordian knot of opposition cut long before then," he said, little dreaming how soon his words would prove true.

He lifted her over the stile, and set her down on the other side. Then he stood by her, and kissed her, lingering still.

"Archie, dear, it is late—so late," she said, gathering courage to go.

"Yes, darling," he answered, kissing her again; "it is late, and I must get on to Stedleigh. But, Grace, if you should not see me for a little while, you must not forget me."

"What do you mean?—what are you talking about? I'll not forget you, even when those grey hairs come."

He pressed her in his arms once more, and then she ran down the path, looking back, and running out of very haste, and fear of the growing darkness.

CHAPTER X.

STEDLEIGH BY MOONLIGHT.

THERE was a low wind rippling the lake at Stedleigh, and the boat which was moored to a tree on its margin, floated out on the curl of the water, as far as its chain allowed.

“ If she could slip her moorings, she would be off down stream,” Archie Douglas said, as he watched the boat creep away from the bank, and thought how he wanted to slip his moorings, if he could only get money enough to carry him away.

He was standing with his mother and Marion, where he had been standing for the

last quarter of an hour, under the shadow of the boat-house, half in the door-way, half outside it.

“It seems only yesterday,” Marion said, “since we were strolling here together; you, and I, and Helen.”

There was another that she thought of, but did not name. She rarely mentioned Harry now.

“Don’t be talking about her; I wish Archie had put her in the lake,” Mrs. Douglas said, in a tone of impatience.

“That would be a dangerous suggestion to act on,” Archie answered with a smile.

“It provokes me to talk about her,” she proceeded. “I’ll engage she is enjoying herself in London while——” “Marion is breaking her heart at Stedleigh,” Mrs. Douglas was going to add, but she stopped.

“While I am slinking about my own home, like a thief in the night,” Archie said bitterly; “but I won’t stand it any longer. I’m tired of it, and I won’t stand it.”

“What can you do?—you must bear it,” Marion answered.

“I’ll turn my banishment to some account.—I’ll go abroad.”

He was treading on the edge of his Australian project, yet afraid to mention it openly.

“If Marion and I could get away after the election, we might meet in Germany,” Mrs. Douglas said, “and your father never know a word about it.”

The continent was her idea of going abroad. Ballarat, and gold diggings would never have entered her head.

“He would find it out, and pounce on us suddenly, perhaps,” Archie answered. “I hate this secret visit,—from my soul I hate it, and would never consent to attempt it in a more extended way. See here, mother, if it were not for you and Marion, and that my father would get up a row with you, when my back was turned, I’d have come straight to Stedleigh, in the face of his anger, instead of dodging round here, like a fellow that had

committed forgery, and was afraid of the police."

"Don't talk in that reckless way," Marion said.

"Reckless! I'm not a bit reckless. You would want a man to hold out his hands to have them tied. I did nothing but what any one would have done in my place; and then to say that my father, not only sent me out on the world, without a penny, but that my very letters were sent back to me."

"For goodness sake, Archie, don't talk yourself into a passion," Mrs. Douglas said, laying her hand on his arm.

"Aye, mother, it's poor comfort to come to see you, and have nothing pleasant to talk about; but it sets me angry to look at this place, and think I have been turned out of it like a dog."

"Well, never mind; if your father wins the election, he will be in better temper, and we shall get peace made. There is no use in saying a word now."

“And if he does not win it, what then? They go up to the poll to-morrow, I hear.”

“Yes, he has been in Cranston all day, and he is dining at The Grove to-night. Mr. Reddington is his right hand in this business,” Mrs. Douglas answered.

“Only fancy the Admiral going to Cranston to vote for us to-morrow. It is thirty years, he says, since he registered his last vote,” Marion said.

“To vote for us! Are you one of the candidates, Marion?” Archie asked, catching up the word. “What talk there would be, if we had women in Parliament.”

“The men don’t talk, I suppose, Archie,” Mrs. Douglas said. “It’s only women who scandalise and babble? Why, you have got an arch talker in Grace’s father.”

“That was a hit, mother, and no doubt about it,” Archie answered, leaning against the door post, and looking out on the water. “There’s a nice cool breeze on the lake,” he said; “see how the boat tugs at her chain.”

Marion followed his eye to the lake, and the boat, and thought of Harry Osborne. She, too, was tugging at her chain.

“What do you say to a row on the lake, mother? I’ll draw in the boat, and pull you and Marion down the stream.”

“Such an extraordinary notion! You are not in earnest, Archie?”

But Archie was in earnest, and, running down to the water’s edge, unfastened the chain from the boat.

“You will not be able to row with us two in it,” Marion said, hesitating, and thinking what would they do if her father returned from his dinner party, and caught them on the lake. “You do such sudden, wild things, Archie.”

“Do I? Well, is it not better to let the element of mischief there’s in me, escape that way? Get in, Marion, get in.”

“You can’t row us, Archie, I’m sure,” Mrs. Douglas said, seating herself under protest.

“As if I never did it before ! I have not a woman’s arm !” he replied, settling the sculls.

“That’s polite of you, Archie !”

“You would not like me to have a woman’s arm ; nor should I like a woman with a man’s arm,” he answered, as he dipped his oars, and the boat went rushing through the water. They went on under the moonlight, straight down the lake, and, shooting the bridge, lay to on the other side, where they talked together in low tones for nearly an hour, and then, rowing up the lake again, landed at the boat-house.

“Archie, dear, about money ?” Mrs. Douglas said, as they stood again in the shadow of the doorway, speaking of that subject last, after the long chat they had had on the lake about Grace, and the warfare at Stedleigh.

“Well, I have not much,” he replied. “I am not worth robbing just now.”

“Your father is not so liberal to me as he was,” Mrs. Douglas said ; “I think he is afraid of me.”

“ I know ; afraid that you would send it to me. As if I could not get money if I chose !”

“ I know that, Archie, but you must not do it, I have got fifty pounds from Admiral Osborne. You’ll pay it again somehow, or Marion will. But I can’t get money from your father.”

“ Marion is entitled to five hundred a year ; she is a fool not to insist on having it.”

“ I had no use for so much before. I never asked for it, and I cannot ask for it now.”

“ Do have patience, Archie,” Mrs. Douglas said.

But Archie wanted money to go to Tom Clifford, and had no patience.

“ I think I am more patient than most people,” he said, fully bent on dwelling on his grievances, “ considering my father’s injustice.”

“ Hush, Archie,” Marion whispered.

“ Never mind, dear, it will soon blow over,” Mrs. Douglas answered. “ In the meantime you must get lodgings somewhere ; that hotel is very expensive.”

“I don’t mean to remain at the hotel, or in London either, mother. To say the truth, I’m sick of London.”

“What are you going to do?”

“What I told you before. I’ll go abroad. There is no use loitering in England.”

“Oh, Archie, dear!” she said, laying her hand on his arm. “You must not go far away. Promise me you won’t.”

“There is no place far away in these days of steam,” he said, evading the promise.

How hard it is for women to manage angry, discontented men.

“You would be much nearer to us in London. You might come down to see us, if you were there,” Marion suggested.

“I cannot come stealing here again, Marion. There is a feeling of degradation about these stolen visits.”

“They shall not be stolen visits the next time. We will have you back after the election,” Mrs. Douglas said.

“I hope so, mother,” he answered; believ-

ing that he should be on his way to Ballarat, instead of coming home.

She put the fifty pounds she had obtained from the Admiral in his hands.

“ You must not leave London yet, Archie : this would not last any time, if you went travelling about, and you will promise me not to borrow on The Grange.”

The Admiral had put that notion into her head, as he had put it into Mr. Douglas’s.

“ I won’t if I can help it, mother,” he answered, not seeing how he was to obtain the money he required, in any other way.

She was beginning to think Archie was not very pliable even to her.

“ You would not do it if Grace Clifford asked you,” she said, with a mother’s jealousy of the girl’s influence.

“ I’d do as much for you, as for Grace,” he answered, passing his arm round her waist. “ There is no one in the world I love better than I love you ; but you cannot understand all I have on my mind.”

She did not understand it, and he could not bring himself to tell her. He would write from London, he thought: there was no pressing need to speak of it now.

“Listen! Is that the sound of wheels?” Marion said, turning her head in the direction of the road.

“No, it’s only the wind in the trees,” Archie answered. “But we must say good-night; it is time you were in doors.”

“Yes, let it be good-night, and not good-bye,” Mrs. Douglas said: and as he stooped to kiss her, she added, “You won’t do anything without letting me know? Promise me that, Archie.”

“Certainly I won’t, mother.”

Then he kissed Marion, and the two women, clinging to him, kissed him again with a fervour, that spoke more of good-bye, than good-night. Away up the path they went a little way, Archie watching them as they walked on together.

“Mamma, will you wait one moment?”

Marion said, stopping half way up the bank. "I have a word to say to Archie." And then she ran down again to where her brother stood, and laid her hand on his arm. "Archie, I have something for you. I did not like to give it before mamma. I had no money, but I had this, and I thought it would do as well."

"Not your ornaments, Marion," Archie said, trying to push back the case into her hand. "I cannot take them."

"You must, they are no good to me now, Archie. Not the least good in the world."

There was a moan in her voice, as she thought what use were wedding gifts, where there was no wedding.

"I cannot touch these. Certainly not these," Archie said, catching her tone.

"They are not his, Archie. His all went back, these are papa's presents." And then bending near him, she asked in a whisper, "Did you hear any news in London, that you

don't like to speak of. Did you hear he was going to be married?"

"Indeed I did not. What put such an idea in your head, Marion?"

"Partly because you never mentioned him. Tell me the truth, have you not seen him?"

"I did not, and I don't like to talk of him. I believe he is in France."

She knew he was not, having heard from Miss Osborne, that he was in London.

"Promise me one thing, if you ever meet him, promise me you will lay no angry hand on him, and say no angry word. You must forget, and forgive as I have done."

Forgiven she had, forgotten she had not.

"Curse him," Archie muttered.

"Hush Archie, you must promise, I'll hold you until you do."

"I will keep out of his way, let him not come in mine. I can promise no more than that."

“Even that is something,” she said. “You will give in the rest again.”

She kissed him, and ran up the path, as the wheels of Mr. Douglas’s carriage came rolling in through the gate.

CHAPTER IX.

HURRAH FOR LORD DERBY AND THE CONSERVATIVE INTEREST.

THE Cranston contest was a great time for Miss Harland. She could sit in the window, and watch all the doings in Mr. Douglas's hotel over the way, and see him addressing his constituents. Hear him she could not, the din, and the distance, prevented that, but it was something to see him standing on the balcony, trying to frown down by his calm dignity, the disrespectful interruptions to which he was subjected.

Ah, Mr. Douglas, dignity is of small service in election times. Hamilton did

better than that. He walked up the town, and down again, leaning on Mr. Beauchamp's arm, or Lord Cranston's, casting a smile here, and a word there, and never suffering the cries of his opponents to ruffle his temper.

"He is a nice young man that," Miss Harland said, as he went past, and nodded in at the window to Mr. Clifford, who stood looking out over her shoulder.

And he was a nice young man. Handsome marked features, smooth faced, except for a short dark moustache on his upper lip, shining black hair, growing close and short, a bright grey eye, a well knit strong figure, and a very white hand, were the chief personal characteristics of Mr. Douglas's opponent.

"Rattle away my lads," he cried, when a number of cat calls, from the unruly members of the crowd, cut through the thread of his speech. "Rattle away my lads, and when you're tired I'll begin again." That was the way to take them. "All right Hamilton." "Go on." "Fair play." "We'll hear you,"

came from various directions. The troublesome, and turbulent amongst the mob, were hustled away in spite of themselves, and the speech went on to the end, tolerably free from interruption.

What a speech it was, not all dry promises and pledges, but pledges mixed with fun, and quick, sharp, humorous touches, that not only set people laughing, and made them listen, but threw a healthy tone into the spirits of his supporters.

Miss Harland drove down in Mr. Clifford's basket carriage to listen, and came back more pleased than ever with the young candidate.

"If I had a vote, he should have it," she said to Mr. Clifford afterwards, as they talked the speech over.

"Aye Miss Harland, you admire a smooth tongue, and a handsome face, like the rest of womankind," the rector answered, laughing.

"To be sure I do," the old lady replied, clicking away at her everlasting knitting

needles, while she watched what was going on in the street. "I might have got one for myself perhaps, only they did not come my way when I was young. I had no money then."

The rector laughed, taking the little side blow dealt to his sex, in good part.

"Grace has no money, yet she has got a handsome lover for herself," he said.

"Mr. Douglas is a nice young man too," Miss Harland answered, giving her usual meed of praise to gentlemen whom she approved of. "I could not understand his coming here after her, and I was delighted when I found it was to be a match. I took such a fancy to him. But as to money, Grace won't go penniless to the Grange if I can help it, George."

They were old friends, and she called the rector "George," now and then, when she was in especial good humour.

"You are very good my dear friend, very good. You always said you would provide

for Grace, when she wanted it more than she will want it now."

"And why should she not want it now?" she asked sharply. "It's not pleasant for a girl to go a beggar, into any man's family. I must have her up here for a week, after the election is over. I'll be very lonely when this excitement is at an end."

"Douglas came down to see her last night, and if she had been up here, he would have missed her. I don't know that she could very well be out of the way, for fear of another sudden visit."

"He can see her here as well now as ever. He is quite welcome to my house," the old lady replied.

"He would not have been able to come here last night. You had better have Jane in Grace's place this time. For my part, I think she is far merrier company."

The needles went very fast, and clinked very loud, a sign that Miss Harland was not pleased.

“Jane was always too fidgetty, and troublesome for me,” she said presently. “However if you can’t spare Grace to see her old friend, you may keep her.”

“Spare her, of course I shall spare her, if you particularly wish it. Douglas must manage as he can.” And Miss Harland’s needles lost their angry click, seeing she was victorious.

While Miss Harland and the rector, were talking in that lady’s sitting-room, the polling was going on hot, and fast, close by. “Hamilton, two hundred and ten; Douglas, two hundred and fifty,” Mr. Reddington said, entering one of the rooms in the hotel, set apart as a committee room, where Mr. Douglas was standing, with his shoulder against the mantelpiece, and his hands behind his back.

“We are ahead for so far then,” Mr. Douglas said.

“Yes for so far. Hamilton is polling his men slowly, but the town is full enough

of them. 'They'll be coming up in force by and by."

"Are the Stedleigh tenants down yet?" Mr. Carruthers asked.

"Not all of them. Most of them are. Though we have sent none of them up yet. Every uncertain vote has been taken, and we have put one or two slippery fellows, past slipping."

And then Mr. Reddington hurried out again, to come in with fresh news by-and-bye.

"We are holding on pretty evenly, now, Hamilton a little in front," he said, when he came back. "We are six hundred and twenty, and he six hundred and twenty-nine."

"Shall we get ahead again at the last, I wonder?" Mr. Wilson asked.

Mr. Reddington looked restless and uneasy.

"We have pretty well counted up all his votes, and ours," he said. "It will be touch and go, I think."

Mr. Douglas walked away from the knot of men, that surrounded him at the fire-

place, and drew Mr. Reddington into the window.

“Fight it out, Reddington, any way and every way. I’d give a thousand pounds to win, if it were only by one vote,” he said, laying his hand on his friend’s shoulder.

Mr. Reddington mused. “I wish we had that rascally Williams out of the way,” he said.

“Is he in Cranston to-day?”

“That he is, fighting tooth and nail for Hamilton. I wish you had let him stay up there on the hill, poaching and all.”

Mr. Douglas leant against the window shutter, looking tired and anxious.

“I would rather never have stirred a finger in it than fail now,” he said. “Everything seems going against me, of late.”

He had thought this to himself often, but he had not said it before. He was a man, who rarely gave another man an insight into his thoughts; but the wear and tear of body and mind, which he had been enduring of late, was too much even for him. A weakness of

frame, and nerve, which sometimes pulls at the strongest of us, was dragging at him, and forcing the words out, whether he would or not.

“We’ll keep up heart!” Mr. Reddington said, encouragingly. “We may carry through yet.”

A shout from the street, a long, loud cheer, and a cry of “Hamilton for ever,” interrupted Mr. Douglas’s reply, telling that fresh numbers had been put up, and that Mr. Hamilton was still in advance. Mr. Douglas turned from the window, and, pouring out a glass of wine, drank it off.

“Some of that would do them good out there. They’ll be hoarse, presently, if they roar so much!” Mr. Carruthers said, as Mr. Douglas joined them again at the fireplace, while Mr. Reddington hustled out of the room.

When he reached the street, Williams was standing in the same place, as he had seen him when he was going in. He was surrounded by the usual knot of farming voters, all eagerly

listening to his rough eloquence, his notions about Parliamentary candidates, and the candidates for Cranston in particular. He had been battling night and day for Mr. Hamilton since the canvassing began, and he was battling for him to the last, in the very face of the polling-booth, and in the teeth of Mr. Douglas's best friends.

What did Williams care, that Mr. Reddington knew, he was Mr. Douglas's bitterest enemy. He rather desired that he should know it, and let Mr. Douglas know it, too. The poor and the rich are, apparently, set wide apart—but the day sometimes comes, when the poor can help the rich, as the mouse in the fable gnawed the snarer's net, and let the lion go free. The day had come now, when Williams could throw back, and repay in kind, the hard measure which Mr. Douglas had meted out to him. Tom had got another farm in place of the one he had lost, but Mr. Douglas could not win another election, or make another borough. Williams laboured,

with a will, to prevent him gaining this one—laboured, as men never labour for wages—but as they labour for vengeance.

“When are you going up, Williams?” Mr. Beauchamp asked, as he pushed forward through the crowd.

“John and I be going together, sir, but not till the last. We’ll be in amongst the majority.”

“Suppose you have no majority,” Mr. Reddington muttered, at Williams’s back.

“But we will have a majority—you see if we won’t. There go the numbers, we be in front—and we’ll keep front. Here’s success to Mr. Hamilton!” and Tom waved his cap in the air.

It was a heavy day’s work. Getting the voters up to Cranston, and keeping them together, in order to send them on as they were needed, was no easy task—and it took the utmost watchfulness from both sides, to mind their men. A vote was worth a good deal to either party, in such a sharp, close

contest, and no one knew this better than Mr. Reddington.

“Whoever wins, will have a tough run for it,” he said to the London agent, that Mr. Douglas had got down to help Spratt—Spratt who did not want to be helped, but would rather have had the weight of the whole thing, on his own shoulders.

“If we have even polling,” the agent answered, “there is certain to be a scrutiny, and that will occasion a nice expense.”

“Mr. Douglas does not care a fig about the expense; but he does care about being beaten,” Mr. Reddington replied, knowing it served a man’s cause, to say in the ears of the world, that he was a man of money, and did not care about expense.

“We’ll not let him be beaten—we have a dodge or two to fall back on, before it comes to that,” the London man said, hurrying away, eager in his employer’s interest, leaving Mr. Reddington talking to Mr. Carruthers, who had just come out of the hotel.

At four o'clock, the polling was still going on—but the voters were getting visibly thinner—many of those who had registered their votes, having slipped off to the public-houses, to drink ale, and discuss the chances of the rival candidates with their comrades. Tom Williams was still in the street with his brother and some more unpolled voters, where lingered also a crowd of dirty children, and idle men, and women, all staring at the polling-place, where the voters went in and out ; and watching the numbers, which were now up in Mr. Douglas's favour.

“ Douglas a-head ! fifteen votes a-head !” Mr. Reddington cried, coming into the committee-room ; “ we shall be all right presently, Hamilton has not many men left.”

“ Bravo !” Mr. Wilson exclaimed ; “ we'll ride in winners yet.”

“ Try and keep that up, Reddington, fifteen votes would be a respectable majority in a close contest,” Mr. Douglas said.

"Fifteen! I wish we may get five; we'll be very well off if we do."

"They'd petition on five, and get up a charge of bribery," Mr. Carruthers observed, who had followed Mr. Reddington in from the street.

"Let them do so; I defy them. I bribed no man," Mr. Douglas answered warmly.

"No, no, Hamilton is not the fellow to throw money out of his pocket, unless he sees a chance of success," Mr. Reddington said. "He watched us closely, as closely as we watched him, and he knows there's no bribery petition possible. Here, give me a glass of wine."

Every one wanted wine, and there was a general drinking of success to Mr. Douglas.

"Thank you, gentlemen, thank you!" he said in acknowledgment. "You have been staunch friends to me in this business. Electioneering, as well as other things, teaches us to know our friends from our enemies."

"Another vote for Mr. Douglas! here is

Admiral Osborne," Mr. Carruthers said, as the Admiral opened the door.

" You are first, I see, Douglas," the Admiral said, holding out his hand. " I've been down to the booth, and given you my name. I'm sorry I can't do more."

" Never mind, he'll be an M.P. before night, duly elected for Cranston," Mr. Reddington exclaimed, cutting through Mr. Douglas's thanks to his friend.

Mr. Reddington was in high glee. Those fifteen votes acted on him like champagne.

" Hamilton's party will be down in the mouth presently," Mr. Wilson observed. " They were crowing like cocks a-while ago."

" I'll be off again and see what they are doing," Mr. Reddington said, who could not rest on a chair, if he had got a kingdom for it. And Mr. Douglas, still leaning against the mantel-piece, awaited his return.

" I would give a thousand pounds to beat him—a thousand pounds down," he said to

himself, while he watched his friends plying themselves with ale, and sandwiches.

The day had worn away. Miss Harland sat in her window watching the scene without, and talking to Mrs. Stokes, who had dropped in with her usual quota of news. Mr. Clifford had dined with her on the eternal roast fowl, which he had adroitly evaded once before, and was out through the town, chatting, laughing, and picking up intelligence wherever he could get it. Mr. Reddington was running hither and thither, all anxiety, all watchfulness. Mr. Hamilton's friends were on the alert too, for the fight was growing closer and closer, and the polling nearly closed. Mr. Douglas was still in advance, only by five or six, but still a-head of his rival. The men were getting thinner and thinner, going up to the poll in ones and twos. A couple of voters, one side or the other, might decide it.

"He'll not overtake us now," Mr. Reddington whispered triumphantly, as two or three of Hamilton's men passed in, followed

by the Williams's. "There goes their last shot!"

"And we have no shot at all."

"Yes we have, two or three."

"Not one, not a soul—we are polled out!
Still I think we shall have the lead."

Mr. Reddington looked uncertain and uneasy: there was not a stray vote to be had.

"Confound that Clifford grinning there!" he said; "if he would only give us his vote; but there has been a split with him too."

"Mr. Douglas is given to splitting, I'm afraid," his companion answered; "he has split with his son."

Then they were silent. It was a moment of intense suspense. Every eye was turned toward the members; men and women who had no interest in either candidate, no vote and no concern in the matter whatever, pressed forward, as people press at a race, to catch a view of the winning horse, although they know, and care nothing for him, or his rider.

"Here they are! here they come!" they

cried, as the last voters left the booth ; “ which will it be, blue or red ? ”

The polling had closed. Down came the old numbers, up went the new. Douglas two thousand and eight, Hamilton two thousand and ten.

“ Three cheers for Hamilton ! ” Tom Williams shouted. Mr. Hamilton’s friends, and the people took up the note, giving a loud, hearty cheer. “ Tell Mr. Douglas I did it, Mr. Reddington,” Tom Williams said at the hotel door in Mr. Reddington’s ear ; “ John and me were the two last voters.”

“ Hurrah, Hamilton, we are in first ! A close run, but we are in ! ” Mr. Beauchamp exclaimed, holding out his hand to his friend.

“ Hurrah for Lord Derby and the conservative interest ! ” young Hamilton cried, taking off his hat.

“ You owe this good fellow thanks more especially,” old Mr. Hamilton said, entering the room, followed by Tom Williams, who stood in the doorway, watching the group of

friends, that hurried up to shake the new member by the hand. "This man, and his brother gave you the casting votes."

Young Hamilton gave Tom's hand a firm grasp.

"I do thank you, my friend, as I thank all my friends for their great kindness in standing by me to-day."

"You need not thank me, sir," Tom said quietly; "I did what I could, but it be all done against Mr. Douglas."

"Well, no matter, his enemies are my friends to-day," Hamilton answered; "I'll not take back my thanks. You will serve me for my own sake, perhaps, the next time."

"It be a pleasure to serve you, sir, and a pleasure to hurt him," Tom answered, twirling his cap in his hands, and fixing his full, clear, blue eye on the young member's face. "You have an English look about you, sir, though they said you were half a Frenchman."

"Who said that?—Mr. Douglas, I sup-

pose. Well, he is wrong in more things than that. He said he would be member for Cranston, you see, and he is not, thanks to you, my good friend."

"That was a bitter grudge," old Mr. Hamilton observed, after Williams had gone. "I never saw a fellow so bent on paying a debt. He worked for us heart and hand. He has a certain kind of clever, sturdy oratory that goes down well with his own class. I believe Mr. Reddington dreaded that man, more than the whole of us."

A very different scene was going forward in Mr. Douglas's committee room, to that which was taking place in Mr. Hamilton's, where the one was all triumph and congratulation, the other dismay and defeat. The loud, ringing shout of, "Hamilton for ever!" which proclaimed Mr. Hamilton's victory, told Mr. Douglas the election had gone against him, before Mr. Reddington had time to carry the intelligence.

"They have beaten us!" he said, raising

himself from his leaning posture against the mantel-piece ; “ do you hear that ?”

His tone was dull and cold, with an expression that showed his great disappointment.

“ I am afraid so,” Mr. Wilson answered ; “ but we shall have certain news in a moment.”

And they had certain news. Mr. Reddington came hurrying in, followed by a troop of Mr. Douglas’s supporters, with defeat written in the face of every man of them.

“ It was that Williams. I knew he would do us damage,” he said, joining the group of men, with Mr. Douglas in their midst. “ They have but two votes above us. It was all that fellow’s scheming. He voted last, and turned the scale.”

“ They would have had his vote all the same, whether he voted first or last,” Admiral Osborne said.

“ Aye, but the rascal wants to have the satisfaction of being the very one to baulk us, and he has it.”

"Let him have it," Mr. Douglas answered. "You have been harping on that man this fortnight."

"We shall have better luck the next time," Mr. Wilson said, no other comfort suggesting itself to his mind.

"As for the next time, I don't know about that," Mr. Douglas answered. "But I thank you, gentlemen, for your support. You did all you could, and we have not failed for lack of friends."

"I always thought you were foolish to bother yourself with politics at this time of day, and I am of opinion you are as well out of them," the Admiral observed.

"I never knew an election won so close without a trick. There's some trick in it. We'll find out what it is, and petition," the London agent said, remembering Mr. Reddington's observation, that his patron did not care about expense.

"Aye, if there's a trick we'll find it out, and petition," Spratt, the little Stedleigh at-

torney, echoed, catching up the cry, seeing a petition would throw money in his way.

They all caught hold of the suggestion, and began discussing it as a real fact—a thing that was going to be. It sounded pleasant to discourse of it. It was not such utter defeat, while they could talk of unseating Hamilton by a petition.

“It’s growing late, gentlemen, and I must get home,” Mr. Douglas said, speaking above the din of voices, that talked of the petition. “We can arrange these matters another time.”

He shook hands with them one by one, and passed out into the inn yard, with Mr. Reddington.

“I don’t think we can do anything—a petition is no good,” he said, sitting on his horse, with the reins lying loose on the animal’s neck.

“I don’t believe it is, myself. But we did our best, and we would have won only for Williams.”

“There is no use talking of Williams; it

was not he that did it. Things are going crooked with me now."

He gathered up his reins, and rode away out of the yard, down a back lane, and so on to the high road, not because he feared to meet Mr. Hamilton and his friends, not because he shrank from being seen as the unsuccessful candidate, but because he wished to avoid the triumph, he knew he should read in the Williams's eye.

He had fought the battle, and he had lost it. He had waded through the mire to win suffrages. He had spoken from the balcony of the Inn, such words as had been put in his mouth by the cunning London agent, who knew something about making speeches, which Mr. Douglas did not. He had borne the jibes and interruptions of the people, and talked on until he said what he had to say, with a stern resolve to have it out, which had a kind of sullen patience in it. He had done all this, only to be worsted at the very last.

“I wish I had never stirred in it at all,” he thought, as he walked past Traynor into the library at Stedleigh.

Mrs. Douglas saw him ride up, from her dressing-room window, and hurried down to hear the news.

“Well, how has it gone?” she asked, pushing open the library door.

“Hamilton is in. He beat us by two votes,” Mr. Douglas replied.

He had laid his hat on the table by which he stood, never looking up while he answered her.

“Perhaps it is as well. You are not able for hard work, Archibald; you have had too much of it this fortnight past.”

“Every one is telling me that,” he said, still not looking up.

“You look tired and over-done. Shall I ring and order you something to eat?”

“I am not hungry. I eat some sandwiches in Cranston, but I would like a glass of wine.”

Mrs. Douglas stepped forward to ring the bell.

“No, no!” he said, putting out his hand to stay her. “You will find some over in that cabinet.”

“I did not know you had wine here,” she said, producing a decanter and a glass.

“Yes, I like to have it near me at times, when I have been sitting up here reading, or writing.”

She knew he had been given to sit up late, since the canvassing began, and Archie had left Stedleigh. But she did not know he sat drinking wine.

His head felt strange, confused, and heavy. He was tired and overdone he thought; he would be better when this fatigue was at an end. He filled out a glass of wine and drank it, and then another.

“I am afraid you are disappointed about this business, Archibald. You don’t seem well,” Mrs. Douglas said, looking anxiously in his face.

“I am quite well, Margaret, only tired. It will be off by to-morrow,” he answered with that heavy, dull sensation still in his head.

“You will be ill if you don’t eat something.”

“Nonsense!” he said, impatiently; “I tell you I am quite well. I cannot eat when I am not hungry. And now you must leave me, for I have a business letter to write.”

She never dare dispute his wish to be left alone, and she went away, leaving him sitting by the decanter, with his elbow leaning on the table.

“Everything is against me,” he muttered to himself, as his wife closed the door. “Everything is against me of late.”

It almost seemed like truth. His daughter’s match broken off, his son in rebellion, and absent from his home; Mr. Hamilton victorious in the election; and more that he did not know of coming.

Inchcauldie was slipping away with Helen Douglas, to Harry Osborne.

Three days after his defeat at Cranston, Mr. Douglas read their marriage in the "Times."

CHAPTER XII.

GOING TO BALLARAT.

THE last week of July was come hot, and sultry, the glass standing ninety in the shade. Not a drop of rain had fallen since a week before the Cranston contest. That was a fortnight ago, and the ground was parched for want of water.

It was past noon, the blinds of one of the large bay windows in the drawing-room at Stedleigh, were drawn entirely, to exclude the burning sunbeams. Near this window, newspaper in hand, sat Mr. Douglas, as he had sat

for the last half hour, never once taking his eyes off it.

In the other window, the blind of which was only partly drawn, Mrs. Douglas stood, watching the sun glistening on the leaves of the trees, until they shone like silver, and thinking of Archie. There had been no letter from him for the past few days. She had gone to The Cliff in vain both yesterday and the day before, in search of one, and she was considering whether or not she would go again to-day, when she caught a glimpse of the muslin dress, and black lace shawl of Miss Osborne coming over the lawn. She walked as much as possible under the shade of the trees, with her parasol upright above her head. It was her peculiar way of carrying it, which no slanting beam ever tempted her to alter, and Mrs. Douglas used laughingly to say, that Miss Osborne considered her bonnet, more than her complexion. But now Mrs. Douglas was thinking rather of the probable letter she was the bearer of, than of the straightness of her uplifted parasol.

“Here is Charlotte Osborne, Archibald,” she said turning to her husband, as Miss Osborne came along the terrace.

Mr. Douglas laid his paper on his knee.

“Don’t bring her in here,” he said. “I don’t want to see any of the Osbornes to-day. She has come with news which I know already.”

“What news?” Mr. Douglas asked, connecting his remark with Archie, as people are prone to connect everything with what they are most anxious about.

“News of Sir George Osborne’s death. I have got it here, and of course they know it at The Cliff.”

He pushed the paper across the table, but she did not look at it.

“There is only one life now between that girl and her ambition,” she said, bitterly. “What did he die of?”

“Old age and feebleness, I think, the paper is not specific; it merely states he died sud-

denly while sitting in his chair. It was an easy death, free from pain and trouble."

Miss Osborne passed the drawing-room window, looking in as she went by.

"Pull down that blind, Margaret," Mr. Douglas said, "the light hurts my head."

"Your head! is there anything the matter with your head?"

"Nothing. I meant to have said it hurt my eyes. There, go and stop her coming in, I'll draw the blind myself."

"Come this way, Charlotte," Mrs. Douglas said, meeting Miss Osborne in the hall, "Marion is above. Don't talk to her about Sir George," she continued, as they went up stairs. "We saw his death in the paper."

"We had a letter last night; my father is going to the funeral, he leaves for London to-night. In point of fact I ought not to have come out Margaret. But I have a letter for you, and I was afraid to trust it to any one else to carry."

She spoke of her uncle's death in a matter

of fact way. She did not know much of him, and did not love what she did know.

“Helen Douglas is a step nearer the title,” Mrs. Douglas observed, just outside Marion’s door.”

“Harry was a fool in that girl’s hands,” Miss Osborne answered, “it makes me angry to speak of her.”

They then went into Mrs. Douglas’s dressing-room, where Marion was sitting alone, reading and trying to kill thought. She had borne Harry’s marriage as she had borne the rest, patiently and silently ; suffering keenly, but saying little.

The windows of the room were open to let in the air, the blinds pulled down, and the curtains partly drawn across to keep out the sun.

Miss Osborne placed herself on a sofa near to where Marion sat, Mrs. Douglas standing close to her reading her letter. She did not read it out, she ran her eye too rapidly over the paper to find time to speak the words.

“Is Archie well, mamma?” Marion asked, watching Mrs. Douglas all the time.

“Quite well, dear,” she answered, reading on without looking up, and turning the sheet, went half way down the next side, when she looked with a startled expression in her eye, while the colour faded from her cheeks.

“Mamma, what is the matter?” exclaimed Marion.

Mrs. Douglas crushed the letter in her hand.

“It is something worse than anything which has come to us yet, Marion. Archie is going away.”

Her face was white and bore a terrified expression.

Marion leaped up.

“Going away? where mamma?”

“To Ballarat; to Tom Clifford,” she replied. “He says he cannot stay in London to idle and starve.”

She went across the room to the door.

“Mother, mother dear, where are you going?” Marion cried, intercepting her.

“ Let me pass, Marion ! you must let me pass.”

Miss Osborne had risen from the sofa, and followed Mrs. Douglas.

“ Margaret, what are you going to do ?” she said, arresting her hand.

Mrs. Douglas’s face, pale a moment ago, was flushed with excitement now.

“ I am going to Archibald first, and then to Archie ; he must not go. I tell you he shall not go.”

Miss Osborne took her hand off her friend’s arm.

“ Let her alone, Marion,” she said, “ It’s as well your father should be brought to his senses ; this may do it.”

Marion obeyed without a word.

“ This is dreadful work. There has been nothing but dreadful work here lately,” she said.

“ Nothing indeed, since that girl came amongst us,” Miss Osborne answered.

Marion made no reply, but leant her arms

down on the mantel piece, and laid her head against them.

Mrs. Douglas went down stairs with the crumpled letter held tightly in her hand. She looked into the drawing-room, where she had left Mr. Douglas sitting when she went up, but he was not there. Closing the door again she walked across the hall to the library, and entering without notice, found him standing by the table, rummaging through one of its open drawers. His face, as he looked up, seemed to say—what brought you here? She did not leave him long in doubt.

“I have had news of Archie; and such news as it is,” she said, holding out the letter, “Oh, Archibald, will you give me back my son?”

There was a kind of passionate pathos in the appeal, coming as it did from the depths of her motherly love.

“You have been receiving letters from him,” he answered, taking the one she held towards him, “although I desired——”

“As if I could help it?” she cried, interrupting the rebuke, “as if I could live without hearing from him? Archibald how can you be so hard?”

“Was it to ask me that you came here?” he inquired, laying down the letter on the table without reading it.

“He is going away to Ballarat: you must not let him go,” she cried, without answering his question.

The suddenness of the announcement startled him, and he showed it more by a change in his face, than by his voice.

“He is wilful enough to go where he chooses to go,” he answered; and taking up the letter he read it slowly from the beginning to the end, still standing in his place by the table before the open drawer.

Mrs. Douglas watched his face while he read. There was not much hope to be drawn from it. Instead of growing more interested, or anxious as the latter proceeded, it settled down to its habitual expression of grave calm.

Not the calm that has peace in it, but the calm that is hard and cold. He did not speak when he finished the letter, but laying it on the table walked over to the mantel piece. The time was when that chill silence would have daunted her, but it did not daunt her now. She went round the table to him, and held out her hands—

“ Archibald, what will you do ? will you give me back my son ?”

Still the same appeal, the same excited question, “ Will you give me back my son ?” She did not know that she stirred him, he seemed like a great rock, against which the waves dash only to break, and fall away without moving it : but he was stirred nevertheless, although he tried to do battle against its influence.

“ I did not send him away,” he said, “ he went of himself.”

“ No matter, only speak the word, and he will come back,” Mrs. Douglas pleaded again.

“ Let him speak the word himself, Margaret.”

“ What word ?”

“ This word, he can come back to Stedleigh, and all will be forgiven—if he gives up Grace Clifford—I’ll not have him marry that man’s daughter.”

“ And if he will not give up Grace ?”

“ Then let him go to Ballarat.”

“ You would not have him murdered. They murdered the man Tom Clifford went out with, and they might murder Archie,” Mrs. Douglas cried, still holding out her hands imploringly.

He made no answer, but leant his arm on the end of the chimney piece, and his head against his hand. There was a weary manner about him as he did so, which he seemed conscious of himself, for the next moment he raised his head, and stood straight up, as if he would not admit that he needed support.

“ They will murder him, I tell you,” Mrs. Douglas said again.

“ Margaret, will you leave me alone ? There is time enough to talk of this for some days

to come. I may write to him myself to-morrow."

A wise woman would have been satisfied with this concession, from a man such as Mr. Douglas, but Mrs. Douglas was too excitable, and too full of fiery maternal anxiety to be wise.

"If you say that about Grace there is no use," she said.

"Leave me alone, or I will do nothing."

"Yes, you will. You will bring him back. Promise me you will bring him back."

"I must be left alone. I will promise nothing and I will do nothing if you remain here."

"But if I leave you, you will write to him to-morrow."

"Yes, and you may write too."

"I will not write. I will go to him," she muttered to herself, as she went up stairs. "All the powers on earth shall not keep me away from him."

“I always knew he was hard,” she said to Miss Osborne and Marion, when she told her story. “I always knew he was hard, but I did not think he was so hard as this.”

“Mother, dear, he will give in presently,” Marion whispered. “It is something for him to have said even so much.”

“It is no use. Archie will not give up Grace. I know he won’t, and that hard life at Ballarat will kill him. I will go to him Charlotte. You need not try to dissuade me. I’ll go to him.”

“Not now, surely Margaret.”

“No, but to-morrow. He must not be allowed to go away from England.” She went about the room gathering some things which she thought would be needed for the journey.

“Never mind mamma. You will not want to go, and even if you do, Ellen will do all that.”

She did not reply, but went on taking things from her drawers, and laying them in a little heap on the top. She was thinking of what she would say to Archie, of how she

would induce him to remain. And if he would not remain, she would go with him. Of course such a thing was utterly impracticable, but there was nothing impracticable to her then. If he were sick, she could attend him. If he were lonely, she would cheer him. There was cold, and rain, and fever, rife round such places. What if he died away from her? She knelt down by the side of a small, light travelling trunk, shivering as she thought of her darling encountering sickness or danger, and began emptying it of its contents.

“What is it you are doing mamma? If you must work, let me help you.”

“Let her alone, Marion,” Miss Osborne whispered. “Employment will do her good.”

“It has been all Helen’s doings,” Mrs. Douglas said after a little, speaking out her thoughts, as she rose from the trunk to gather the things she had laid on the drawers, and then kneeling down, began placing them within it. “It is all Helen’s doing. I wish she had never come to Stedleigh.”

Marion's lip quivered a moment, but she made no reply.

"I am afraid she is both wicked and cunning," Miss Osborne answered.

"Where is she now?" Mrs. Douglas asked.

"In Paris with—" Miss Osborne stopped.

"She is well off enjoying herself in Paris while my son is being' banished to Ballarat."

No more was said, and she went on packing her trunk.

The bell sounded for luncheon, but no one appeared to eat it, and it was carried away again untasted.

When dinner-time came Mrs. Douglas declined going down, and dined in her dressing-room alone. Miss Osborne having returned to The Cliff, Marion joined her father at table.

It was a stiff silent dinner, at which scarcely a word was spoken. The servants in attendance looked on wonderingly, knowing that something unusual had occurred.

Marion sat over her dinner and then over her dessert, looking at her father. She had a matter she wanted to speak to him about, a proposition concerning Archie that might make peace perhaps. But she was too cowardly to broach it. She had thought over it all day without mentioning it to any one and now when the time had come she was afraid to act. She was dying to say, papa, I wish to speak to you. If she could only get those first words out the rest must follow. But she could not get them out, although they rose to her lips twenty times, and she left her father by himself, over his wine, with the dreaded sentence still unspoken.

CHAPTER XIII.

MARION AND HER FATHER.

AFTER his daughter had quitted the room, Mr. Douglas drew his chair sideways to the table, and leaning his head on his hand, in the same weary way he had leant it in the library, sipped his wine mechanically and thought of his son. The election was lost, and Inchcauldie had slid away from him. Would he let Archie slide away, too?

That bit of land had cost him very dear. For it had broken up his household happiness, wrecked his daughter's peace of mind, and

parted from his son. Was not the price he had paid already too much, and was he to pay more yet?

Archie had said he would go to Ballarat, and Archie had shown him that he was a man to keep his word. He tried to persuade himself the threat was all moonshine, an attempt to scare him into yielding. But he could not get himself persuaded. Archie was too honest in his nature for such a scheme as that, and his mother's terror was too genuine for him to suspect her of suggesting it.

Look at it in what way he would, he was convinced there were but two courses open to him: either to let Archie know he was willing to bury the past and receive him again, or to allow him to carry out his design of leaving England.

Six months' ago, Mr. Douglas would not have hesitated perhaps between the two alternatives. Inchcauldie was open to him then. The desire for Inchcauldie would have given

him cause to battle ; but now Inchcauldie was gone, and some of the strength of his dominant will was gone likewise.

The fatigue and anxiety of the canvassing, the loss of the election, and Helen's marriage had been pulling down his mental and bodily powers. Admiral Osborne was right when he said he was too old to worry himself with politics ; at his time of life he needed quiet and rest, and he had given himself neither. If he had succeeded, all might have been well, but he had failed, and the failure told heavily upon him ; all the more heavily from his being a man whose feelings rarely worked to the surface.

He looked tired and worn as he sat with his head resting on his hand, trying to arrange the letter he told his wife he would write to Archie. But his thoughts did not come in the lucid way habitual to him. He endeavoured in vain to keep them fixed on one point. Do what he would they chased one another through his brain in a loose irregular

way, and the subject of the letter would not keep uppermost.

He had better lay the whole thing aside, until to-morrow — his mind was not clear enough for business now. It had not been clear all day. He had been going over the items of one of the election accounts in the morning, and had found himself unable to master it. He would settle Archie's business, and it together to-morrow, when he was more himself.

If he could only get rid of the confused weight which had oppressed his head ever since the day Hamilton won the Cranston election, he would be well enough. From that time forward he had been trying to supply the vigour it deprived him of, by stimulants. A glass of wine brightened him for a little while, and he was induced to go on with the remedy. But even wine was failing him to-night, and if he attempted to arrange Archie's matters under present circumstances, he would find himself playing a

losing game. His letter must be carefully written—the conditions of peace carefully set out, lest he might be led into yielding too much.

He had a vague notion he ought to yield nothing, and let Archie go away as he had elected. Had Marion disappointed him as Archie had done, there is little doubt in her case, he would have yielded nothing; but his son was different. None knew how tightly his love for Archie was coiled round his heart. As David cried, in the hearing of his captains, "Oh, Absalom, my son, my son," so did Mr. Douglas cry for his son, when no one was by to listen.

Mrs. Douglas thought he had been hard to Archie in the early part of the day, when, if she had seen the inner workings of his mind, she would have known he was far harder to himself, inasmuch as he strove to stifle his wish to pardon, and clog it with conditions which Archie was certain to refuse.

Those conditions he was determined to

adhere to, with all the determination left him. He could wipe out what was done; although to such a temper as his, that wiping out was a great concession; but he was resolved Archie should not brave him by marrying Grace Clifford. He was up in arms, and ready to do battle about her, and if Archie would not consent to forego that plan, why then—. He did not finish the threat he was whispering to himself, but he took up the decanter, and filling another glass of wine, drank it off, and soon after he was dozing, with his head dropped forward on his hand.

“This will never do,” he thought to himself. “This weight in my head, and this drowsiness must be looked to—I’ll see Brand to-morrow.” Dr. Brand was the well-known Cranston physician, who was always in attendance at the Manor, at such times as the family were unlucky enough to need his services. Mr. Douglas dozed off again, after his muttered intention of seeing Doctor Brand. When he awoke Marion was in the room.

"I was going away, for fear of disturbing you. But, as you are awake, can I say a word to you, papa?" she said.

She had never come face to face with her father on actual business before, and now she trembled at the task she had taken in hand.

"Certainly. I have been asleep—I was tired, but I am rested now."

He told himself he was tired, but in fact he had been doing nothing all day, except hanging about the library, reading, or arranging papers.

"What I have to say won't take long. It is a word about Archie. You will let him come back to Stedleigh?"

Her father was better after that doze. It had cleared his brain somewhat, and he met Marion's question with all his bristles set. He would not have her, and his wife, teasing him for ever on that one harrassing topic.

"It all rests with Archie himself, whether he comes here again or not."

"Mamma told me you said he must give

up Grace. But surely you will not let him leave the country on her account?"

"You had better not ask what I shall do, if he refuses to part from her. I am apt to adhere to what I say, when once it passes my lips."

Marion had not sat down, but spoke to her father standing at the opposite side of the table. Now she walked round the room to where he sat.

"Then papa don't say it," she said, gaining courage as she went on. "But tell me will you do this? Will you let me give Archie Stedleigh in exchange for the Grange? and that will make up for Grace's want of fortune."

Mr. Douglas looked at her in surprise.

"What made you think of this, Marion?"

"A desire to have my brother back. You will not let him go to Australia, papa, surely you will not."

"I repeat again, that rests with himself. As for you, you cannot be allowed to deprive

yourself of Stedleigh. You would repent your generosity hereafter."

"I would not. Trust me, I would not."

"The Stedleigh rent-roll is ten thousand a year, Marion. The Grange rent-roll a thousand, with your mother's jointure to come out of that."

"I don't spend the half of that sum, papa."

"Probably not through your private purse, but see the things provided otherwise. How far would it go in keeping up such an establishment as you are accustomed to."

"I cannot argue the points, only I don't care, so that I have Archie home again."

"But if you married?"

"Don't talk of that, papa. I'll never marry now."

An approach to the subject of marriage, made her wince, under the sting of Osborne's faithlessness.

Her father made no reply to her remark, but sat thinking. To say that he did not

covet Stedleigh for Archie, would not be true, he did covet it, as he had coveted it all his life. He had had hopes of it coming to him through his sister's love. Those hopes, her engagement to Osborne had put an end to for a time. After that engagement was broken off, he began speculating upon it with more certainty ; but now that Marion's generosity put it as it were at once into his son's hands, now that she offered to step back, and take The Grange in place of it, a sense of justice withheld him from accepting it, without at least placing before her fairly, the great thing she gave away, and the little she took in exchange.

Another consideration also made him hesitate. Marion came armed with a bribe, and that bribe was fettered with a condition. She had not put it forward in an abrupt, blunt way, as a man might have done, but she had put it forward very distinctly, nevertheless. She had said plainly, Stedleigh was to make up to Archie for Grace Clifford's

want of fortune. Consequently, Archie was to have Stedleigh, provided his father withdrew his opposition to Grace.

Mr. Douglas liked very well to dictate conditions himself. He liked very well to say "I will do this if—" and then to hang on a clog to that "if," of whatever weight it pleased him. On the other hand, he did not approve of being done by, as he did. He owned to himself that Marion's offering Stedleigh to his son, was an act of noble generosity, but he did not like Grace Clifford, being mixed up with it. It almost made him feel as if Stedleigh was partly to be given to Grace, and not entirely to be given to Archie. With all this going through his mind, he said suddenly—

"I cannot let you part with Stedleigh in a hurry, Marion, lest you might repent. Nor can I allow Archie to marry that girl."

"I will not repent about Stedleigh, and as to Grace—"

"Let me hear no more of her. I don't

believe that Archie would ever have thought of her, only for opposition sake. He will forget her in six months if he is let alone."

"We will let him alone then. Perhaps he would agree to hold his engagement unfulfilled for a time. Say two years, and give him a fair trial."

Mr. Douglas got up, and stood by the table.

"I am not disposed to talk of this any more to-night," he said. "I will see you to-morrow, before I write to him."

She did not venture to press the question farther, but went away up stairs to her step-mother, and Mr. Douglas, after standing a minute or two where she left him, quitted the dining-room, and went into the library.

It was nearly the bed hour, but he seemed to have no thought of going to bed. He began fidgetting through his desk, and the drawers of the library table, even taking down the old chocolate case, which contained the map, and the musty letters, and deeds. He unlocked

it, and left it upon the table, with the lid closed, while he went on settling various papers, which he had disarranged in the morning, all the time trying to make up his mind with regard to Archie, and fighting away the heavy pressure in his head. That sleep in the evening had done him a great deal of good he thought. He needed a rest after dinner, and if Brand did not differ from him to-morrow, he would not try to shake off the drowsiness which had set in upon him recently.

Marion's offer with regard to Stedleigh, was tempting him strongly. It would be such a prospect, for Archie to step in for it at his death, as if he were the eldest son of the house. He had always thought it a crying shame, that Marion should hold a property like that, and carry it away into another family. Still he did not feel that it was quite just to her, to accept it. The Grange was nothing for her to fall back on, but there were large accumulations gathering for five and

twenty years. He might make up the loss in some degree out of those.

The condition about Grace was the only real difficulty. He could not submit to that. Marion's last proposition was more feasible, overhold the engagement, and let Archie forget her. "Take him out of the way, and he will do it more easily," he said to himself, without a touch of feeling for Grace's suffering in the matter. "Take him from Stedleigh for a while, and throw him into the society of other women, such women as Lady Osborne, perhaps Lady Osborne herself, with her large jointure. She might not despise Stedleigh, although she would despise the Grange. Archie admired Lady Osborne strongly, and anything, or any one, was better than Grace Clifford. Mr. Douglas's ambition for his son was expanding, under the new turn affairs had taken. But through it all, he was conscious of that dead, dull weight, pressing on his brain, and kept repeating to himself, that he must see Brand to-morrow.

After a little, he sat down and opened the well-known chocolate case, scattering the contents upon the table. He tossed over the papers one by one ; then he opened the map, and dipping his pen in the ink, passed and repassed it across the crimson spot in the corner, where his finger used so often to wander up and down, until he darkened it over, and literally blotted it from the face of the map ; and when Inchcauldie had disappeared, he did the same by the green strip that stood for Glenlure. Neither of those possessions of his father would ever be his now, and he would put them away out of his sight. They angered him with Archie, and roused up the old dogged, unforgiving spirit within him.

Twelve o'clock struck, and found him still busy amongst his musty scraps and papers : then one o'clock, then two, and yet he had never come to bed.

“ Marion,” Mrs. Douglas said, entering Marion’s room, in her dressing-gown, and rousing her from her sleep ; “ I am getting

uneasy about your father : he has never come up stairs. What can he be doing ?”

Marion rose, and threw on her dressing-gown.

“ Come down, mamma, and we shall see.”

They hurried down stairs, and looked into the drawing-room first. The lights were out, and the room was empty.

“ He must be in the library,” Mrs. Douglas whispered. “ What can he be doing there ?”

What can he be doing there, truly, with his head bent forward on his arm, right over the map, and the mass of papers that lay about the table ? Mrs. Douglas started forward in terror.

“ Archibald ! Are you asleep ?” she cried, laying her hand on his arm.

No answer came to her question. Asleep or dead ; which was it ?

She passed her arm round him, and drew back his head. His forehead was clammy, and cold, but it was not the cold of death ;

and there was a white froth gathering on his lips.

“ He has had a fit ! he is dying ! Ring the bell, for God’s sake ! Send for help ! ”

“ Dying,—not dead ! ” Marion exclaimed ; “ we may save him yet ! ”

The servants came rushing into the room, and carried their master away, from between the two shivering, terrified women, that supported him in their arms. They brought him up stairs, and laid him on his bed ; horses were saddled in haste, and grooms galloped for medical aid ; one for such as could be had in Stedleigh, while another rode hard to Cranston for Dr. Brand.

How many of us say to ourselves, like Mr. Douglas, “ I will see Brand to-morrow ; ” when we should see Brand to-day, or Brand a week ago. And perhaps the to-morrow, may be a day too late.

CHAPTER XIV.

ARCHIE, IT MUST BE PEACE.

DOCTOR BRAND came in hot haste from Cranston to Mr. Douglas's bedside. He examined the patient, shook his head, and spoke in whispers to his colleague, the Stedleigh doctor, who shook his head likewise, and seemed overawed in the presence of the great Cranston physician.

Doctor Winter had done everything that could be done in the case, the great man said. The little man pocketed the praise with satisfaction. Nevertheless, Brand thought it necessary to add a remedy of his own, and went

down stairs to the library to write a prescription, which Dr. Winter was to make up.

Mrs. Douglas followed him to the head of the stairs, and begged to be told the truth—
“Was there any hope?”

“While there is life there is hope, my dear madam. Rest assured I shall do what I can.”

It was but poor comfort he had to give, and the doctor, pressing her hand, hurried down stairs to write his prescription.

He took paper from Mr. Douglas’s open desk, and pushing aside the litter that strewed the table, scrawled the magic words that were essaying to stop the hand of death hovering over the rich man’s chamber.

“Let this be sent down to Stedleigh at once,” the doctor said to Traynor, whom he met coming through the hall, with his usual gliding step.

“Yes, sir. There is a mounted groom waiting for your orders,” Traynor answered; and then he added, in a tone in which con-

cern was strongly mixed with curiosity, "How did you leave my master, sir?"

"The remedies Doctor Winter used have had some little effect, but it would be hard to say yet. Your young master is not at home, I believe?"

"No, sir, he is in London."

"Then he ought to be telegraphed for at once. Get me his address from Mrs. Douglas, and I will do it as I drive through Cranston."

The doctor drew on his gloves, and Traynor departed on his errand. Archie's address came down from Mrs. Douglas, written in pencil on a scrap of paper, with a line of thanks for Doctor Brand's kindness scribbled indistinctly underneath.

The doctor drove away from Stedleigh, in the grey light of early morning, leaving Mrs. Douglas, and Marion, watching with Doctor Winter by Mr. Douglas's bed, and Traynor busy in the library, inspecting the scattered papers which lay upon the table.

He went over them carefully, conning them with curious eyes, picking up much information which he was in the dark about before. A letter from Angus Douglas, written after Helen's marriage, which no one in Stedleigh, save Mr. Douglas himself, had ever seen or heard of, threw a light on the reason, why that marriage of Archie's was a matter of such moment to his master.

Disjointed memoranda in Mr. Douglas's hand, and the blotted spot on the map, all went to satiate the thirst for knowledge, so strong in the eager, prying domestic; and when his hour of secret inspection was over, Traynor left the room, putting the key in his pocket.

"Mr. Archibald would like to have it all right when he comes back," he said to himself, as he closed the door against everyone's curiosity, save his own.

It was a strange kind of faithfulness, but strange as it was, Traynor would have considered it a breach of trust, to leave his

master's papers, under the hands of the other servants in the house.

As the morning advanced the news spread apace through Stedleigh, that there was sickness at the Manor. No one was clear precisely as to what had struck Mr. Douglas down, but they knew that he lay hovering between life and death. They knew too that Doctor Brand still shook his head over the case, and had more fear than hope. Friendly inquirers, and curious inquirers, called through the day, and were answered by the servants with solemn faces, and low voices, which were danger signals in themselves.

By one o'clock the news had reached the Grove, and Mr. Reddington rode down to the Manor as rapidly as might be, to learn the truth. Traynor appeared to answer his summons, but Traynor had little to tell. Things were pretty much the same way as they had been in the morning. "Mr. Archibald had come," he said, "and was with Doctor Brand in his father's room."

Mr. Reddington acting on his electioneering intimacy, went into the dining-room and said he would wait until he saw Doctor Brand. He walked up and down the room, with restless steps. He was neither an impressionable nor a sentimental man, yet he could not help thinking of the gay uproarious party, so recently assembled there, with Mr. Douglas at their head, and of the sudden blow which had overtaken him in a moment; a blow which may fall on any of us, and might fall on Mr. Reddington himself, as well as on his friend.

It is the nearness of these things to themselves, which make some men feel, and Mr. Reddington, pacing up and down the Stedleigh dining-room felt a kind of creeping fear.

“This has been dreadfully sudden, Doctor Brand,” he said as that gentleman, after being stopped by Traynor as he was going through the hall to reach his carriage, was ushered into the room. “It has been dreadfully sudden, but I hope it is not serious.”

The Doctor shook his head, as he had shaken it, from first to last.

"I cannot give a positive opinion yet," he answered.

"But on the whole, have you any hope?"

"For so far, no. A change may come, however. I have seen such things, and don't like to speak positively."

As if Doctor Brand ever did speak positively, until a man was dead.

"How did it occur? A sudden stroke, I suppose?"

Doctor Brand took out his watch, as if to intimate his time was precious.

"Yes, sudden in the end," he said, restoring it to its place. "Those things are always sudden in the end. But it has been hanging over him for some time. He should have sent for me before. Mr. Douglas has evidently over exerted himself lately, Mr. Reddington. He was not a man fit for that heavy canvassing, and electioneering work."

And Doctor Brand hurried off, after giving utterance to the half-expressed opinion, that the election killed his patient.

While his friend Mr. Reddington was busying himself about him below, upstairs in the darkened sick room, Doctor Winter, Mrs. Douglas, Marion, and Archie, were gathered round the bed of Mr. Douglas.

Doctor Brand's telegram had caused Archie to start for Stedleigh by the ten o'clock train, and he had arrived, just in time to meet him at the Manor, on his second visit.

They had not caught much hope from the Doctor's words, or the Doctor's manner, and they sat by the patient, watching him with a fear, that dreaded any change, lest it should be a change for the worse, rather than for the better.

Yesterday, he was struggling against the failing power of his strong will, trying to shut the door of concession, as far as might be, lest he should yield too much. To day helpless and

weak, shattered in mind and body, and reduced to the feebleness of a little child. Mr. Douglas lay in the long torpor, from which he had never been roused, since his wife found him in the library. Some slight improvement had manifested itself, but not such an improvement, as brought back sense, or speech, or even justified his medical attendants, in predicting a favourable issue.

“If papa recovers you will not go to Ballarat, Archie,” Marion said, later in the day, as they stood together in Mrs. Douglas’s dressing-room.

Marion was drinking a glass of wine, which Archie himself had carried up stairs for her. He was standing by while she drank it, writing a note in pencil to Grace Clifford, to tell her he had come to Stedleigh, and would see her when he could.

Grace knew nothing of the Ballarat plan ; his courage had failed to write of it to her, when he wrote to his mother. He had intended writing that very day, but Doctor Brand’s

telegram, and his father's illness, threw everything into uncertainty and confusion, and the few lines he scribbled to her, were only to let her know he was near her ; as if Mr. Clifford had not heard of his arrival in the village, and made it known at the Rectory

“ I will stay by my father if he will let me, Marion,” Archie said, in answer to her question. “ If he will not do so, I have no alternative but Ballarat.”

“ He will let you. He was going to write to you to-day ; only consider this, Archie, that if he have a little crotchet left, you must try to give way to it.”

She was thinking of her own proposal, of overholding the engagement.

“ God grant it may be such as I can yield to,” he said.

That great blow had sobered him, and made him anxious for peace.

“ Papa and I came on an arrangement last night, Archie, and he is to buy Sted-

leigh from me for you, that you may have it at his death."

"Buy Stedleigh?"

"Yes, I will live at the Grange. I am a widow you know now, Archie. Since Helen has got my husband, I shall need a jointure house," she said, smiling up into his face, with such a sad sad smile, at her melancholy jest upon Harry's desertion of her.

"I don't understand you, Marion. The Grange is no fitting exchange for Stedleigh."

"No, Archie dear, of course not, but there are to be other arrangements. I cannot talk any more about business now."

Mr. Douglas might recover entirely, or recover in part, and wish to arrange his affairs, Doctor Brand had said in the morning, before he left Stedleigh; and Marion thought it better to provide against a want of understanding on Archie's part, and now that that was accomplished, she slipped back

into her father's room, to resume her watch by his bed.

Doctor Brand was to return to Stedleigh at six o'clock to dinner, and remain there all night. It was impossible for him to stay during the day, as his extensive practice demanded his presence in many sick rooms.

"I will relieve you of some of your responsibility and watching," he had said to Doctor Winter, at the close of a whispered conversation at the farther end of the room. "I'll be over here to stay to-night, that is if it be required, but I think all may be over before then."

All may be over. The bridge passed that divides life from death, and across which there is no returning. Once over the boundary, and we leave all our worldly ambitions, longings, and jealousies behind. We cannot take up our griefs, and carry them with us, so likewise must we leave our joys at the edge of the stream, when we pass the

narrow lake, between us and the unknown world beyond.

It was past five o'clock. Doctor Brand would be at Stedleigh in less than an hour, when Doctor Winter, looking in Mr. Douglas's face, saw the change coming, for which he had watched all the day through.

It came slowly at first. A slight movement of his head, then a quivering of his eyelids, and his eyes half opened, closed and then opened again, wandering round the faces about his bed, as though in search of some one. Then he half raised his arm, as if disposed to put it to his head, but dropped it again, apparently unable to carry it so far.

"He is better, Doctor," Mrs. Douglas said, in a low tone, looking anxiously in Doctor Winter's face.

"Better? Yes, I hope so. I wish Doctor Brand was here."

What could Doctor Brand have done, when the dying man's flickering intelligence

was only struggling back to life a few moments before it went out altogether.

Doctor Winter knew he could do nothing, but he felt the weight of the responsibility heavy on him, and he wished Doctor Brand was present, that he might share it. Not without confidence in himself; not without skill—under ordinary circumstances, he would have needed no shoulder to lean on. But he had never been placed in such circumstances as these. His practice was chiefly amongst the poor, or the farming, and shop-keeping class. He had never been called on before in his practice of thirty years, to keep guard by a rich man's bedside, at least not such a rich man as Mr. Douglas of Stedleigh.

The novelty of the situation, and the stately grandeur of the place appalled him. The richness of the furniture, and the numerous servants, that comprised the Stedleigh establishment, added to his bewilderment. He had been overcome in the beginning, at find-

ing himself acting in concert with Doctor Brand, but the awe of that great man had been so far put out by an awe of a different kind, that he looked forward ardently for his appearance, to lighten the load that oppressed him now. But Doctor Brand would not come before six o'clock, and he was obliged to bear his troubles until then.

"A little wine, Mrs. Douglas," he whispered to her, as she leant over her husband. "Just a drop in a spoon."

Marion's ready hand poured some into a teaspoon, and gave it to Mrs. Douglas, who put it to Mr. Douglas's lips. Little as it was, it helped to strengthen his struggling faculties. The light in his wandering eye grew stronger, and Mrs. Douglas still bending closely over him, heard him murmur, "Send for Archie."

His son was uppermost in his thoughts even at the last.

"He is here," Mrs. Douglas answered, trying to keep down a sob.

“Where?” Mr. Douglas asked more distinctly.

Archie bent forward and laid his hand upon his. Mr. Douglas’s fingers seemed to respond to his son’s, as if he knew whose hand touched him, but he did not speak again.

Doctor Winter gave him another spoonful of wine, and stealing out of the room stood at the head of the stairs, with his watch in his hand, peering over the banisters, anxiously waiting for Doctor Brand.

Five minutes more passed in silence, during which Mr. Douglas seemed endeavouring to gather strength to speak, and when he did speak, it was with less effort than before.

“Archie it must be peace.”

“Yes, father, peace. Thank God that we have met to make it.”

“Marion will let you have Stedleigh. You must marry, you know Archie.”

Then he stopped, as if conscious he was

rambling off from the point, of what he wished to say.

"Never mind father. Don't trouble yourself with business until you are better," Archie said.

Mr. Douglas moved his head slowly, as if to intimate he would not be better.

"Yes, yes, you will be better, Archibald dear," Mrs. Douglas murmured. "But you must not annoy yourself trying to think."

"About The Grange, Archie," Mr. Douglas said again, without appearing to understand his wife's injunction to him, not to think. "It's not enough you know, but you can make it,—"

"Hush papa, dear, you will settle it all yourself," Marion interposed.

Mr. Douglas was silent a moment, and closed his eyes wearily.

"There's the funded money," he murmured presently, "that must be hers and Margaret's."

His thoughts were running on the unfinished

sentence about The Grange, and he called his wife Margaret, as if he forgot he was speaking to her son.

He closed his eyes again, and there was a long, long silence,—a silence which lasted nearly half an hour. At the end of that time, Mr. Douglas moved a little restlessly, and looked up again, in the anxious faces assembled round his bed.

“About your marriage, Archie, and Helen’s,” he said, with more strength of voice and clearness, than he had spoken with before.

“You forget Helen is married, father,” Archie answered.

“Yes, yes. Well, some one—Lady Osborne—.”

Archie and his mother, and sister, looked at each other in questioning surprise.

Mr. Douglas’s mind was evidently wandering. He seemed utterly to have forgotten Grace Clifford, and even Helen’s marriage. But what drove Lady Osborne into his

thoughts. They had no clue to the various speculations, which had been filling his brain the night before, and were coming back to him now in broken links.

“Never mind, let him sleep,” Mrs. Douglas said. “He would be better if he slept.

Perhaps he heard her, for he shut his eyes, and turned a little round on the pillow, as if he were going to do as she wished. But after lying a minute or two, quite still, he threw up his arm, as he had thrown it up before in an effort to reach his forehead, muttering, as it fell again listlessly on the bed. “I must get rid of this weight, I’ll see Brand tomorrow.”

They were the last words he had framed in his thoughts, the previous night in the library, over his papers, and they were the last words he uttered before the great silence fell upon him, which he was never to break again.

Doctor Brand's carriage came rolling up the avenue, at a few minutes after six o'clock, and Doctor Winter met him in the hall.

"No need for either of us here now," he said. "Mr. Douglas is dead, and we have just got the ladies to leave the room."

CHAPTER XV.

GATHERING UP THE THREADS.

ONE glance more at Stedleigh, before I let the reader put away the story, and close the book.

It is fourteen months, since Mr. Douglas was carried away from the Manor, and laid by Mary Westbrooke, in the vault in Stedleigh churchyard.

Stedleigh itself, wears the same look of quiet beauty as it wore then, except that the Autumn brown is deeper, and that a few withered leaves are scattered here and there, giving signs of the changing season.

Doctor E:
up the avenu
o'clock, and I
hall.

"No need
now," he said.
we have just
room."

He and Archie, who have but just returned from their wedding tour.

The Grange had been remodelled, and re-furnished, under Marion's directions. Bay windows, such as Archie has at Stedleigh, have replaced the stiff square ones, which nearly disfigured it. A large portico has been erected over the entrance door, which Marion will insist on having covered, pillars all, with luxuriant creeping plants, in spite of the horror of Masterton, the head gardener at Stedleigh, who declares such things, to be the height of rural vulgarity.

The trees have been all pruned, and the garden and domain set in order, so that what with the improvements outwardly, and the handsome new furniture which decorates it inwardly, the Grange bids fair to rival many of its more assuming neighbours.

As to Marion herself, she is so pleased with her new home, and the effect of her improvements, that she even goes so far as to, say she prefers it to Stedleigh, declaring

it to be a kingdom much more suited to a woman's rule, than the extensive dominion she resigned.

“What would I do with Stedleigh, Archie dear?” she urged to her brother, when she was insisting on having her way in parting with it. “Only think, how could I manage my tenants? I should be obliged to put you to stand between me and Watkins, and give you half the profits for your trouble,” and between bantering and persistence, she carried her point.

As to the other personages of my story, they are going on pretty much as we left them. Mr. Clifford himself, is not only as jovial as ever, but more jovial since his daughter's marriage, seeing that it turned out much better, than events promised at first.

It is Saturday evening now, and Mr. Clifford is busily engaged preparing his sermons for to-morrow; two stirring discourses on the vanity of riches, which are to

be divided into heads, for the benefit of his morning and evening congregation.

How he will deal blows at that vanity, which he hugs to his heart, every time he chuckles over Grace's luck, or speculates on Miss Harland's legacy. By the by, he has changed his tactics with that lady, and is substituting demure Annie, for dashing, saucy Jane, who had no chance whatever of edging into Miss Harland's favour. Annie has been staying with her in Cranston since Grace's marriage, and bids fair to divide the spoil of her eight thousand pounds with her favourite, and god-daughter, upon whom she looks with greater pride than ever, since she has become Mrs. Douglas of Stedleigh.

The Cliff was shut for awhile after Admiral Osborne went to his brother's funeral, and then the furniture was removed, and the place let to other occupants, between whom, and the Manor, there is no visiting at all.

The Admiral did not care for returning to The Cliff, as Harry and his wife could not very well come to Stedleigh, so he and his daughter have found a home near Brighton, but our old friend does not like his new residence nearly so well as the one he has resigned. Not only are the ties of five and twenty years broken, but the south coast is far too tame to suit his taste. The waves do not come lunging in upon the beech with the sweeping force which he loved to see, and he quarrells daily with the beautiful smooth coast line, which fails to compensate him for the loss of the rough breakers, and bluff headlands, he was accustomed to at Stedleigh.

He chose Brighton because it afforded him the best chance of seeing Harry occasionally, as Helen sometimes thinks fit to exchange the gaieties of London or the Continent for Brighton. Indeed she frequently announces that she loves Brighton, which is certainly more than she does her hus-

band, therefore Brighton may consider itself especially complimented.

As to Harry himself, as Frederick Osborne foretold to Archie, his folly has overtaken him, and found him unarmed. He had drifted near Helen Douglas, as he used to dream of drifting at Stedleigh, and now he must drift with her to the end. He had sacrificed Marion Douglas in order to take this girl to his heart, and she had no heart to give him in exchange ; she never had much at any time, but the disappointment, about Archie Douglas, had killed even the morsel, Lady Mackenzie's tutelage had left her.

Helen never loved Harry Osborne, and she did not love him now. She married him to obtain certain social advantages, and she thought more of those social advantages, than of him.

Evidences of a capricious, discontented temper, began to appear very soon after her marriage. Many a little peevish burst, which had been kept down resolutely at Stedleigh,

shewed out when the necessity for concealment was removed. Harry could not but admit to himself occasionally, that that floating by Helen's side, which he had thought so pleasant, when he sat with her in York Place, did not come out as well in practice, as it had done in theory.

Sir George Osborne's death, had put the Admiral in possession of the title and estates. Harry's allowance from his father was of course considerable, but his wife had wants which fully covered it, and would have covered a great deal more, if she had had it, and because she could not have it, she was dissatisfied.

How different it would have been, if he had been true to Marion, but Harry dare not trust himself to speculate upon that, even when he too, was captious and discontented.

Our cunning acquaintance, Angus Douglas, still lives at Inchcauldie, peddling amongst his few lean sheep, and moorland farm, gathering his petty hoards, from the scanty profits of that

morsel of land, for the possession of which Mr. Douglas had paid so weighty a price.

Neither he, nor his colleague Lady MacKenzie, does Harry love, although he is obliged to submit to them, as appendages to the wife he married.

Lady Osborne has been spending the latter part of the summer on the continent, and is at present enjoying herself at Baden Baden, doing her little flirtations under the discreet guardianship of an old maiden aunt, who turns up her eyes at her niece, behind her back, and is as civil to her face, as poverty, and toadyism, can make her.

Rumour says, that her ladyship is on the look out for a successor to Sir George, younger, and of higher rank than the poor old Baronet, with whom she made her first essay in matrimony, and that Lord Henry Craven, being a younger son, has got his conge long ago.

Archie Douglas's old haunt in Chancery Lane, is still in the possession of Frederick Osborne. That gentleman is flourishing apace,

creeping in for an excellent practice, through the patronage of a shrewd old attorney, whose discerning eye, discovered the cleverness of the young barrister, when working with him in the case, where Frederick held his first brief; that same brief, which had hurried him from The Cliff, when he went down there as ambassador for his cousin.

He has not married yet, nor is matrimony even troubling him.

“Of course you advise me to marry,” he said, in answer to a letter from Archie written from Wales, when on his wedding tour. “I knew you would, before I opened your letter. It’s the way the madness always takes people. I never knew a fellow who had made an ass of himself, who did not try to get his friends to follow his example, because it is pleasant travelling in a drove of donkeys, I suppose. When I get a wife, I’ll get one who can pay for her own pearl powder, and perfumery, at least, and I am quite ready for a favourable chance, so if you know of any young and

pretty woman, anxious for a husband, and able to embark a large sum, in experimental house-keeping, be sure to remember that I am in the market, and rather high up in it too, for so far, as there is no heir of Harry's, between me and the title yet."

"He is a queer fellow, Grace," Archie had said, when he threw her over the letter, "but I have grown to like him somehow, with all his oddities; we must have him down to Stedleigh for a week, or two at Christmas."

He is saying the same thing to her again this very evening, standing on the bridge, to which they have extended the walk, they were bent on, when we saw them at the drawing-room window.

Grace is looking up the stream, towards the boat-house, where the boat is still moored to the tree.

"There is the boat, Archie," she said, as they dismissed the subject of Frederick Osborne, and began talking of other things.

“There is the boat, in which I saw you and Helen, the day I ran off from Stedleigh.”

“Aye, and in that same boat, Grace, I rowed my mother, and Marion, down the lake, the night I met you in Williams’s meadow. We lay to, below the bridge here, and talked upon the water for a hour.”

“It was a great battle that, Archie, a terrible battle, and it was not really about Helen after all.”

“No, darling; but about that poor, miserable, barren Inchcauldie. I never dreamt of such a thing, until I saw my father’s papers. Was it not strange how little of his mind we actually knew?”

Tom Williams, with a gun upon his shoulder, came through Stedleigh wood, out upon the lawn, and his appearance put an end to the conversation.

“Have you done any damage to the game to-day, Tom?” Archie asked him, as he stopped at the edge of the bridge.

He had given Tom leave to have a day’s

shooting now and then, and in virtue of his privilege, he had been on the hill with his gun.

“ Not much sir, I be not thinking of the game to-day. You see Mr. Clifford is to settle a little business for me next week, and I be thinking more of that, sir.”

“ Are you and Ellen to be married next week, Tom ?” Grace asked.

“ Well, you see Mrs. Douglas, we fixed for next week,” Tom answered, looking away over the lawn. “ I be wanting to have it done, and over, before the season be run out.”

Archie laughed.

“ All for the fine weather, is it Williams ? Well, you have a better house to bring her to, than you would have had at the old place. Were you past there to day ?”

“ Aye sir, and I went in to see Watkins. I be not fretting about it now, sir, as Cawton’s land is good land, and there’s money to be made of it.”

“ All right, Tom, I’m glad you are contented, and I suppose your mother is satisfied too? How is she?”

“ Well sir, thank you, she be preparing to go to John’s, she be to keep house for him.”

“ Until he gets a wife, I suppose?” Grace suggested.

“ That may be a long time, ma’am,” Tom answered, with a laugh in his eye. “ Ye see John be no talker, he would hardly talk enough for courting.”

Grace smiled, and Archie laughed outright.

“ That’s a queer notion, Williams, but I want to ask you one question about that old poaching business, Was my father right or wrong? You know it’s past and gone, and I’ll say nothing about it, only I’d like to know.”

Williams put his gun on the ground, and laid his hand on the muzzle.

“ Well sir, I’ll just tell the truth, he was

partly right, and partly wrong. Davis, when he be dying, went rambling about things that had happened years before, as if they had happened yesterday. It be the case sometimes, I believe, sir."

"But did it happen years ago?"

"Well, you see sir," Tom said, colouring a little, "I fell in with him on the hill, when I was a boy, and he taught me to make traps, and that sort of thing. I be quick at it, and he used to get me to steal out of nights, and set them for him, because you see sir, the keepers never would mind me."

"Still that was poaching, Williams."

"No doubt it be sir. But I was only a boy, and when I got bigger and had sense, I didn't do it sir."

"You ought to have told my father that, Tom, and he would not have done as he did, about the farm."

Tom shook his head.

"It be hard to say, what he would have done sir."

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“ Well, well, Williams, at all events it’s all over, but I am glad I know the truth,” and Tom, shouldering his gun, went on his way through Stedleigh to the Grange, whither Ellen had removed, with Mrs. Douglas, on Archie’s marriage.

THE END.



